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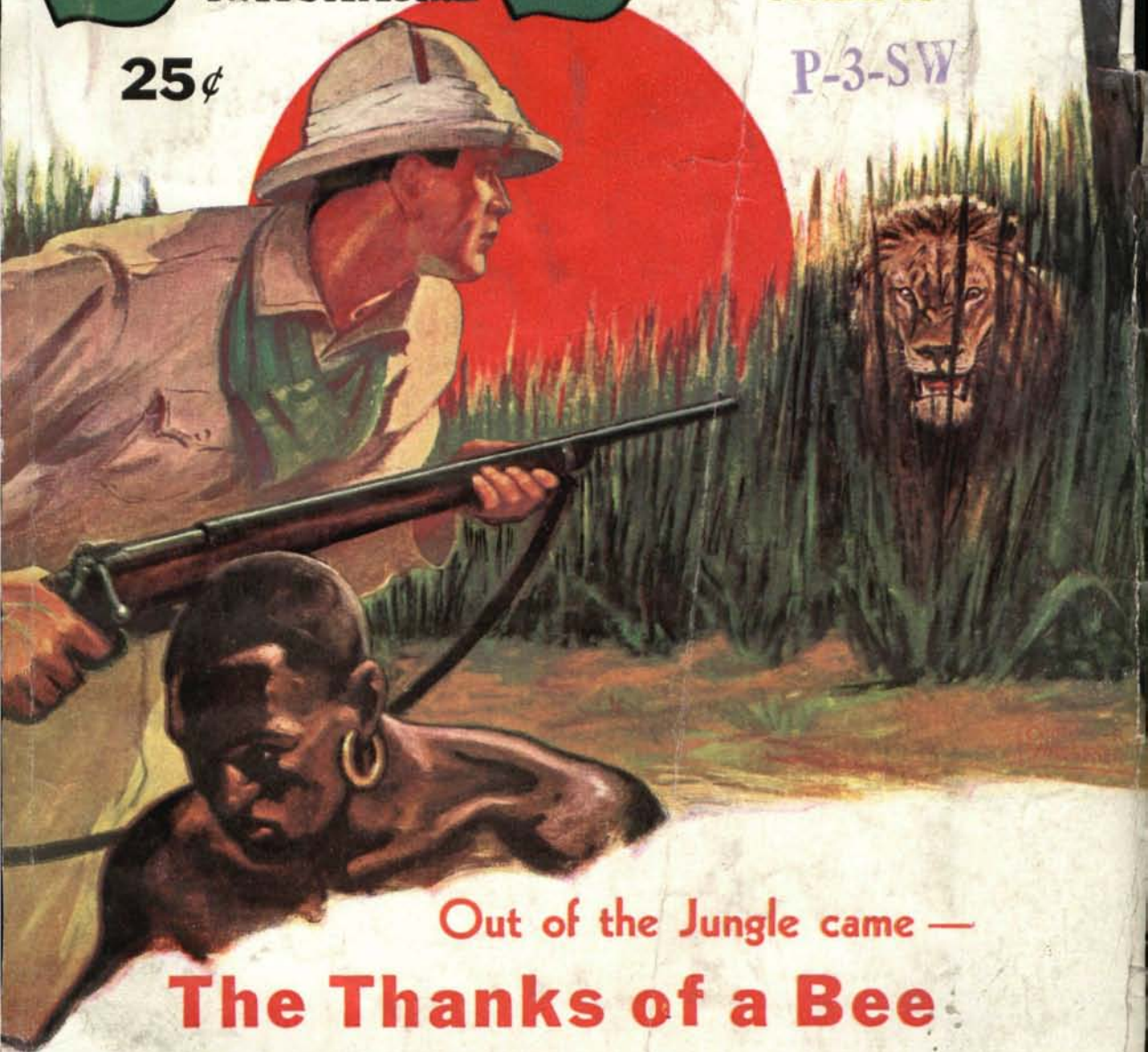

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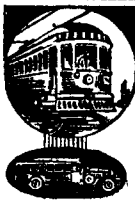

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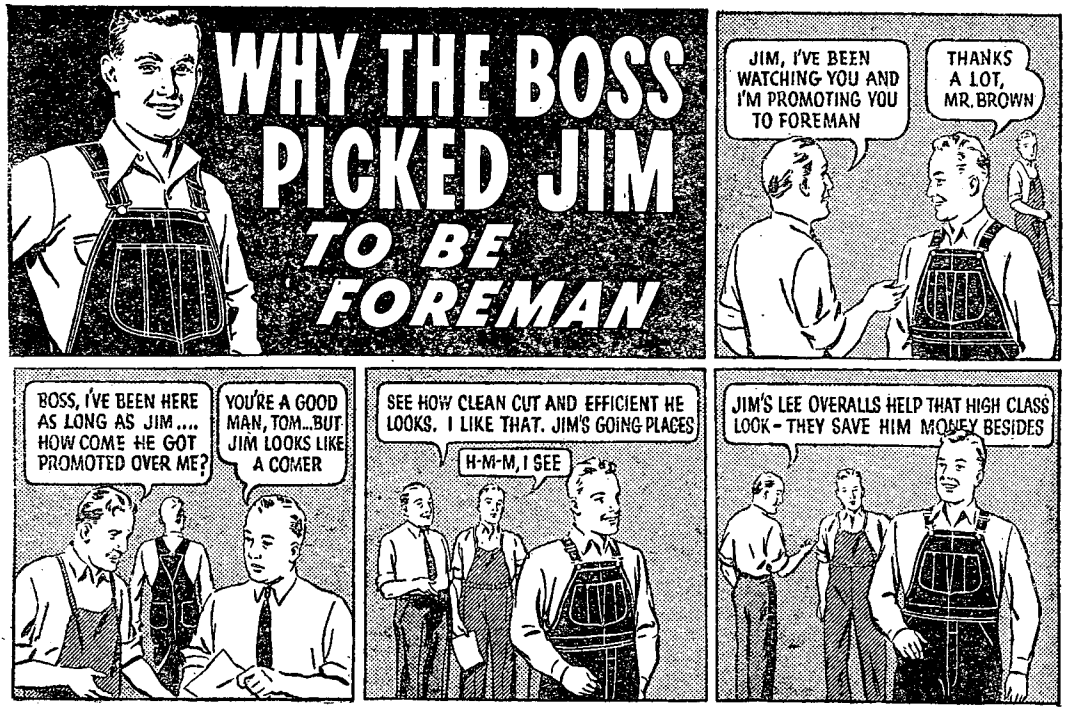
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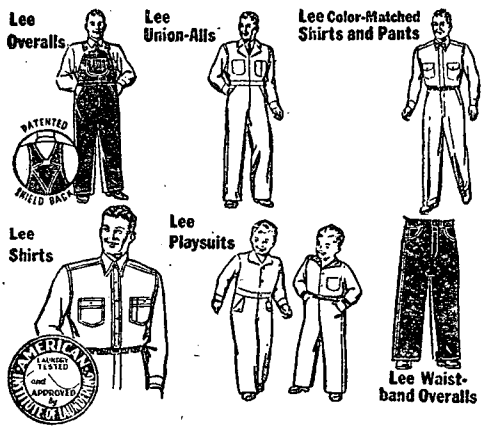

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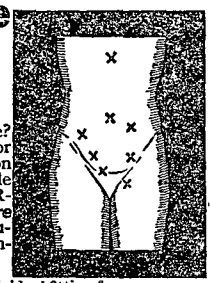

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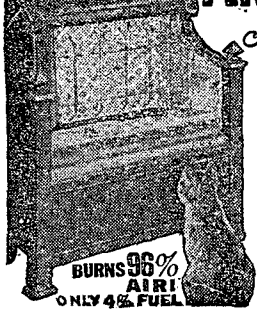

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BIGGEST AND BEST—ACTION

Short

TWICE A MONTH

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Stories

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The Major Lost Himself Deliberately—One of the Hardest Things for a Seasoned Voortrekker To Do

THE THANKS OF A BEE

IT IS very easy for a man to get lost on the veld or in the bush country of Africa; even experienced hunters have been known to lose their bearings and, overcome by the blind panic of lost helplessness, have actually walked within a few yards of their outspan unaware of its proximity. It is especially easy, of course, for a greenhorn to get lost, or for one who, despite many years residence in the country, has failed to develop a sense of veld-craft.

On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for a man to lose himself deliberately. That Africa which is a tangled maze of barren solitudes to the man who is lost, becomes a place of a thousand eyes and whispering tongues to the man

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By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "The Perfect Impersonation," "The Biggest Game," etc.

who seeks to hide himself from his kind. The eyes of Africa are always wide open and the darkness of night does not blind them. The tongues are never still; they speak of what the eyes have seen and there is no way of gagging them.

And specially hard is it for a man to lose himself if he happens to have an outstanding personality and is well known —"confoundedly well known, old top"— to white man and black, from the Zambezi to the Cape, from Mozambique to Walfisch Bay. It is harder still if that man is accompanied by another, equally well known.

That at least was the experience of Aubrey St. John—he always insisted that Sinjun was the correct pronunciation—Major, and of Jim, his Hottentot servant.

The Major—white Africa conferred the military title on him in the days when Illicit Diamond Buying was one of the crowded professions—did what he could by way of disguise; a thick beard covered his face, blurring his well-shaped chin, changing the contour of his face. A full mustache, its ragged ends hanging like a curtain over his upper lip helped to conceal his white even teeth when he smiled. He allowed his hair to grow, tufts of it hung down unkemptly from under his battered felt hat; and it was his normal custom to brush back his jet black hair in an immaculate pompadour. What little else he could do by way of changing his appearance, he had done. In the matter of clothing and outfit he had been very drastic. Normally he looked like an effete dude, complete with mon-

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ocle. From the top of his white pith helmet to the tiny golden spurs which glistened in the heels of his highly polished riding boots, it was his custom to be so well groomed that he might have served as a tailor's dummy, exhibiting what the well-dressed horseman wears. But a prospector down on his luck, or a Sundowner might have been forgiven for sneering at the shapeless, patched and stained garments the Major now wore. And instead of traveling luxuriously in a well equipped trek wagon drawn by sixteen mules, or riding his black stallion, the Major was now trekking on foot and two donkeys carried his meagre equipment.

But no disguise could detract from his height—he was well over six foot—or from his splendidly muscled body; nothing could hide the keen intelligence of his blue—or were they steel-gray?—wide-spaced eyes. Nothing could hide that save the monocle he wore in normal times—and a monocle did not belong to his present guise; nor did the drawling, affected voice which, with the monocle and his assumed air of helpless inanity had so many times in the past lured men in to accepting him at his face value to their own ultimate discomfiture.

As for Jim the Hottentot—there was nothing he could do to alter his appearance; nothing could change his barrel of a chest or shorten his powerful, abnormally long arms. A thin straggling beard, which he now affected, could not mask the scars which lined his ugly face or hide the look of almost animal-like devotion which lighted his eyes whenever he looked at the Major—his Baas, who could do no wrong.

THESE two, who knew Africa and were known by Africa, were trying to lose themselves. They were fugitives; in a sense they were in full flight from an act of justice which, paradoxically, had given them the freedom of Africa. For services rendered, services which had saved Africa from the devastation of a bloody rebellion, rewards had been offered them. When they had refused those rewards, this other thing, this freedom, had been forced upon them.

Both men loved adventure and lived by it; risk was the salt which flavored life for them, but the rewards which men of high influence in the affairs of Africa were forcing upon them had robbed them of much of that salt. And so they had disguised themselves and had fled to a country where they were least well known and where there were fewer people to know them! And so they had come after many days of varying fortunes and adventures—for they attracted adventure to them as flowers attract bees—they had come to this water-hole which was within a couple of days trek of the Gorongoza Mountains in Portuguese East Africa.

They made camp with efficient, practised ease, ate a very light meal, then each retired to a shady spot and prepared to sleep through the noon-day heat.

TO Frank Mayne the veld was a desert; a vast, uninhabited waste. He saw nothing living, he did not believe that anything *could* live in that place. He rode at a break-neck speed through the bush, raking the sweat-blackened ribs of his horse with bloody spurs; his face was tense and in his wide staring brown eyes was a look of fear.

Several times he suddenly changed his direction. Once he yanked viciously on the curb reins and brought his horse to a rearing, plunging halt. Then, standing up in the saddle, balanced precariously, he shaded his eyes and scrutinized the veld all about him. But his untrained eyes saw nothing to help him. Though he looked directly at a thin coil of smoke rising up from the veld not a mile distant—he did not see it. The distant hills seemed to his fear fogged vision as unreal and as immaterial as a mirage.

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Putting his hands to his mouth he shouted hoarsely. He shouted again—then listened.

There was no response—none at least that he heard. It seemed to him that his voice had been swallowed up in a vast silence. There was not even an echo. And he could shout no more.

He sat down again in the saddle and rode on, spurring his horse to a gallop. He always reined to the right when confronted by an obstacle he could not ride over or through.

Twigs of bush lashed his face and ripped his clothes. The bough of a tree under which he passed swept his helmet from his head and he did not stop to retrieve it; it is doubtful if he were aware that his helmet had gone.

The hills which had been directly before him were now on his left hand; he was riding in a wide circle, but he did not know that.

His lips were cracked, and bleeding. His tongue was swollen and furred. It felt as if it had been turned into cotton wool. He fumbled for his water bag which was strapped to his saddle wallets. He put the canvas bag to his lips and tilted back his head. A trickle of water, a few sweat tainted drops, drained into his mouth.

He cursed miserably. The bag dropped from his nerveless hands.

The horse, completely exhausted, a sudsy foam creaming its neck, slowed to a walk, but Mayne, in a fear-born panic of rage, spurred brutally and the horse, snorting protests, broke into a labored gallop.

Presently—and with such devastating suddenness that it seemed as if the veld had risen to meet him—the horse went down. Its off fore foot was in an ant bear hole. There was a sickening crack, a whinny of pain.

But Frank Mayne heard neither the crack nor the whinny. He had hurtled through the air as his horse went down and was now endeavoring to get out of the thorn bush into which he had fallen. It was a *wacht-en-beetje,* a wait-a-minute bush, and its sickle shaped thorns held him fast. The more he struggled, the tighter the thorns held.

He swore continuously in a dull, monotonous voice and he kept his eyes fixed on his horse, for he was desperately afraid that the animal would regain its feet and gallop away before he could get free from the thorn bush.

And so he did not see two men racing across the veld toward him and did not hear the white man's shouts of encouragement, or the Hottentot's soothing cries to the pain maddened horse. And when the two men suddenly appeared, standing beside the horse which was now patiently quiet, Mayne gaped wonderingly, unable to believe the evidence of his eyes.

Then he renewed his frantic struggles to get free of the thorns and cried out:

"Come and help me, can't you? Come and help me!"

The Major turned to him.

"Take it easy," he said in a thick, coarse voice. "You can't hurry a *wacht-en-beetje* bush. We'll give you a hand as soon as we've attended to your horse."

As he spoke he was expertly examining the horse's leg.

"Poor old chap," he drawled softly in his normal voice.

The Hottentot made the *clicking* sound of sympathy.

"We can do nothing for him, Baas," he said.

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THE Major drew his revolver.

"We can end his pain, Jim," he said.

He fired and the horse's suffering ended in a shuddering sigh which eased out its life.

"Now we can give you a hand," the Major said as he turned and went forward with Jim to help Mayne. But the killing of his horse—and to him it had seemed a wanton killing — had filled Mayne with a blind, unreasoning rage. With a desperate lunge, heedless of the thorns which tore his flesh, he broke loose from the bush and rushed at the Major.

"You swine!" he shouted hysterically. "You—"

He drew his revolver and fired. The hammer *clicked* harmlessly and he threw the weapon at the Major's head, following it up with a savage rush, swinging his fists wildly.

"Leave him to me, Jim," the Major called as the Hottentot made ready to rush in and quiet the maddened man with a blow from his knobkerry.

The Major easily evaded the mad rush then, closing quickly, wrapped his arms about Mayne, pinioning his hands to his sides in a powerful grip.

"Take it easy, youngster," he said. "Take it easy."

But Mayne still struggled, cursing and kicking wildly. Then, very suddenly, his struggles ceased and his body went limp; he would have fallen but for the Major's hold on him.

The Major lowered him slowly to the ground.

"Is he dead, Baas?" Jim asked casually as he looked down at Mayne's deathly white face.

The Major shook his head.

"No, Jim. It is only the little sleep, brought to him by hunger, thirst and the fear of being lost. Give me the water bag."

The Hottentot handed his Baas the canvas water bag and taking the stopper out, the Major knelt beside Mayne, raised him to a sitting position and splashed water into his face.

Presently Mayne opened his eyes and stared around wildly.

"Take it easy, youngster," the Major said. "Here. Have a drink."

He held the water bag to Mayne's lips, but Mayne knocked it on one side with an exclamation of anger.

"You rotter!" he shouted. "You killed my horse. You—"

He tried to rise to his feet, but he felt unaccountably weak and a slight pressure of the Major's hand on his chest was sufficient to hold him down.

As from a great distance he heard the white man's voice:

"Steady, youngster. Take things easy. Don't rush your fences."

With a great effort Mayne fought back a returning unconsciousness and held out his hand toward the water bag.

The Major held it to his lips.

"Drink very slowly," the Major said. "That's the way. Just a sip or two at a time. There! No more now. But everything is all right. You're no longer lost. But don't talk. Don't think. Just relax. Jim, here, will carry you to my camp. When you've had a good meal—and perhaps a sleep—we will talk. But not until then."

Mayne made no protest when the Hottentot picked him up and carried him as easily as if he were a child away from the place.

The Major examined the horse's saddle and bridle and finding them in bad condition—the metal rusty, the leather rotten and clumsily patched—he did not bother to remove them but hurried after the Hottentot, stooping to retrieve the revolver as he went.

He nodded in understanding as an examination of the revolver disclosed six spent cartridges.

"Bally lucky for me" he drawled in

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English. "I suppose the poor blighter fired all his ammunition as soon as he discovered he was lost. Wonder who he is and where he came from? Of course he's a complete greenhorn and Jim and I will have to dry nurse him. It's goin' to be a bit of a nuisance, my word it is. We'll have to take him to Umtali and some know-it-all Johnny is sure to spot us. Oh well, we'll see!"

HALF an hour later Frank Mayne announced that he could eat no more of the nourishing buck stew with which Jim had loaded his platter, but he did accept another cup of black, fragrant coffee.

"This is good," he said wonderingly. "I've never drunk better."

The Major laughed.

"Jim *is* a good cook," he agreed. "Well, now; how do you feel? Do you think you could sleep—"

"No," Mayne interrupted quickly. "I'd be afraid I'd dream. I—I was lost and—" He shivered violently. All his past experiences and fears welled up, seeking utterance. He stammered excitedly.

"Steady, youngster," the Major said calmly. "That's all past. And you don't have to sleep. We'll talk. That'll help clear your mind of the things you don't want to remember just yet. Later, perhaps, you'll be glad to remember. It'll give you something to talk about. It isn't every one who has been lost in the African bush—my word, it isn't."

Mayne calmed down, he even smiled a little answering the laughing challenge of the Major's blue eyes—he thought those eyes had been gray, a steely gray, a little while ago.

"Now first of all let me clear your mind on one thing," the Major continued. "About your horse—" Mayne's eyes clouded for a moment—"the poor brute had broken its leg. I had to shoot him. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," Mayne stammered. "And I'm afraid that was my fault. You see, he was tuckered out, but I spurred him to gallop and he—"

Mayne's voice broke.

"Don't blame yourself too harshly," the Major said quietly. "It was an accident which might happen to any one. The veld around here is honeycombed with ant-bear holes. And your mount put its foot down one of them. Now then, I admit it's not quite the thing to—er—enquire too closely into the pedigree of a fellow veld traveler, but I think that in this case we might dispense with the conventions, don't you? What's your name?"

"Mayne, sir. Frank Mayne."

The Major bowed. There was a half-mocking, whimsical smile on his face.

"Charmed, I'm sure," he drawled.

Mayne stared at him. Somehow the Major's voice, his smile and the grace of his movements seemed to replace his travel-stained garments with the immaculate attire of a man-about-town. It stripped the beard from his face and fixed a monocle in his eye.

"And your business?" the Major asked. His voice was now rough; he was once more an ungainly man, dressed in the nondescript clothes of a veld wayfarer.

Mayne started.

"I'd forgotten. I must go, sir. Thank you for the food. I feel quite strong now and I can go on."

"Sit down and don't be a fool," the Major exclaimed. "And don't call me 'sir'—it makes me feel grandfatherly. My name is Major—Aubrey St. John Major. At your service." He bowed again.

MAYNE laughed as he resumed his seat on a blanket roll. The name and the bow belonged to the vision of the man which had come to him a little while ago. Applied to this veld tramp they were utterly incongruous.

"But I must go," he said, sobering suddenly. "You see, Mr. Major—"

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"We'll dispense with the Mister, too," the Major interrupted. "Call me 'Major'. That name's quite sufficient. Now then, suppose you tell me all about it? Take your time. Start at the beginning."

"There's not much to tell, Major," Mayne said. "At least, not much that I understand." He laughed. "Three months ago I was a bank clerk in a sleepy English town—with no more excitement than tennis, a bit of golf and an occasional ride on a boney old hack. Nothing like this ever entered my wildest dreams—" he added with a shudder, "or nightmares. Well about three months ago we received a letter from my mother's brother. He's been out here over thirty years. He's a prospector, but he hadn't had much luck, I imagine. When dad was alive, mother used to send uncle money at intervals and he was always writing that soon he was going to be rich and he'd pay it all back with interest. It got to be rather a joke with us. Uncle's letters were always full of what was going to happen on his next trip."

"That's typical prospector's enthusiasm," the Major observed. "What's your uncle's name?"

"Smithers, sir. Henry Smithers. Do you know him?"

The Major shook his head.

"No. At least not by that name. But it's a big country and there are a lot of prospectors. Most of them have nicknames—and their real names are forgotten by everyone, including themselves. They lead a hard life. The only color most of them see is labelled 'hope'. And it's generally deferred, at that. But go on; I'm getting too talkative and this is your story. You were telling me about your uncle's letter."

"Yes, sir," Mayne said with some excitement in his voice. "For once uncle did not talk of 'next time'. He said that he had located a rich claim and he enclosed with his letter a map showing where the claim was and gave directions for finding it. He said he was afraid something might happen to him before I came out and he didn't want to register his find yet. He gave a lot of involved explanations for that. We didn't understand, but maybe you do, sir?"

"He was a little greedy, that's all, Mayne," the Major said. "He wanted to make sure of the best. You see, once he registered there'd be a rush to the place and he might find—as others have—the claim he'd pegged for himself fizzle out while the adjoining ones proved rich."

"I see, sir," Mayne said. "Well, I went into a family conference with my mother, sisters and brothers and we decided that it was up to me to do as uncle wanted. So we managed to rake together enough money for my passage and some sort of an outfit."

THE Major nodded understandingly.

"Well, sir," Mayne continued, "when I got off the train at Umtali where uncle had arranged to meet me, I was met by two men who said they were his friends and that he'd asked them to meet me. Of course I was cautious, but when they gave me a letter from uncle any suspicions I might have had vanished."

"Have you got that letter?" the Major asked.

"Yes, sir." Mayne took an envelope from his pocket and gave the paper it contained to the Major.

Dear Nephew Frank (It read)

I have been forced to change my plans and cannot meet you at Umtali. But I am eagerly awaiting your arrival, saying to myself: Don't be so impatient.

Trust Rakes and Franklin who will hand you this. They are great friends of mine and will bring you out to the claim.

They are at the back of this venture of mine. I needed capital and they are providing it.

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Plan to rob yourself of sleep so that you can get out here quickly for I am eager to hear all the home news you will have to tell me.

Forced to write like this because I am held prisoner by a particularly malignant attack of malaria.

Rakes and Franklin will meet you at train.

Your affectionate uncle,
Henry Smithers.

P. S. Are you clever, Frank? I hope so. Stupid people miss a lot.

"Doesn't write a very legible hand, does he?" the Major commented. "But perhaps that is due to the malaria. Well, go on."

"Of course," Mayne resumed, wondering why the Major still puzzled over the letter, "I placed myself in the hands of uncle's friends—although I must say I wondered why they were in such a hurry to get out of Umtali."

"You didn't stop at Umtali at all?" the Major asked.

"No, sir. Franklin came up to me as I got off the train and handed me uncle's note. When we got outside the station there was Rakes with horse and pack mules and we set off at once. They said they would send in for my kit later.

"I enjoyed the first two days of our trip, for everything was so new and strange and though both men were a bit surly they seemed to know the country jolly well and told me all sorts of interesting things."

"On the morning of the third day, Rakes said:

"'We're going to let you guide us now, Frank. It'll be good experience for you. You've got your uncle's map and instructions—so hop to it!'

"I don't know why, but that aroused my suspicions. I told them that I didn't have a map and hadn't the slightest idea in which direction to go—and that was true.

"We made camp very early that night—yesterday, I think it was—because Franklin said one of the pack mules had a sore back. When I awoke this morning, I was all alone. Rakes and Franklin had disappeared. The pack mules had gone. I thought at first they were playing a joke on me—testing me to see if I could find my own way. I determined to show them I could. But when I looked for uncle's map with the instructions written on it—I carried it in a wallet in my breast pocket—it was gone!

"I'm afraid I lost my nerve then. I saddled my horse and rode all day in the direction I thought they must have taken. That's all!"

HE STARED miserably before him.

"And quite enough too," the Major said. "But cheer up, old chap. Things might be much worse. "We'll get on the trail of those two blighters. I suppose," he added casually, "that you haven't the slightest idea where your uncle's claim is located? I ask, because that is where we will find Messrs. Franklin and Rakes. *And* your uncle."

Mayne shook his head.

"All I remember," he said in a low voice, "is that the claim is west of Umtali. 'A three day trek', the instructions said."

"Well, that's something," the Major said cheerfully. "Perhaps you'll remember more later on. Now the best thing for you to do is have a good sleep."

"I don't want to sleep," Mayne protested.

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"Well, just relax and take it easy," the Major said. "That's better. It's all so quiet and peaceful—" the Major yawned —"and low drone of insects combined with the mid-day heat always makes me feel bally lazy. I often think—"

The Major's voice droned on and on in a lazy, monotonous drawl, seeming to identify itself with the somnolent song of insects. Gradually the tension left Mayne's body and presently he slept.

The Major rose softly and joined Jim who was sitting on a termite heap some distance away, watching the grazing pack donkeys.

"He sleeps, Jim," he said with a chuckle.

"He is very young, Baas—and a fool," Jim said flatly.

"Years will cure the one complaint—experience the other," the Major retorted.

Jim grunted.

"He might have killed you, Baas. *Wowe!* He was lost, if we had not gone to him he would—in two or three days—have died. But he was like one gone mad —and he gave you the thanks of a bee."

"The thanks of a bee, Jim?" the Major questioned with a laugh. "That is some new riddle. I have not heard it before. And what is the thanks of a bee?"

"In its sting, Baas. In its sting."

The Major laughed.

"That is good, Jim—but not true."

Jim shook his head.

"So you say, Baas. But about this youth who was lost; what do we do with him?"

The Major told Jim Mayne's story.

"I do not like it, Baas," Jim said decidedly. "Maybe he is the bait used by evil men to trap you."

"I do not think so, Jim. He is without guile."

"So he may be, Baas. But what does the bait put on a hook to snare a fish know of the use to which it is being put. So I say, have care, Baas." The Hottentot paused a moment, then continued. "But what can we do, Baas? How can we help in this matter? We do not know in which direction the two evil men have trekked. We do not know where this young fool's uncle is. There is nothing we can do."

"He sleeps now, Jim," the Major said. "Perhaps when he awakens he will remember more things to tell me. And then —there is this letter."

"Then sit beside him, Baas, and think hard of the things you want him to answer. Perhaps your mind will reach to his."

The Major nodded. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he concentrated for a while on the letter he still held in his hands. Presently a smile of triumph softened his face and he underlined certain words and phrases in the letter. That done he went back and sat down beside the sleeping man.

IT WAS nearing sun-down when Frank Mayne awoke, yawning and stretching himself lazily. He smiled vaguely as he saw the Major sitting beside him.

"Tell me," the Major said in a voice which commanded obedience, "all you can remember of your uncle's instructions and about the map he drew for you."

"There was a kraal here," Mayne said slowly, sitting up and scratching a line on the ground. "And near the kraal is a hill called— Oh, I've forgotten what it was called. Some long native name. It began with 'M' I think." He frowned in an effort of concentration.

"Don't try to think," the Major said quietly. "Listen." And he repeated a long list of native names—the names the natives of the district had given to kopjes.

Mayne shook his head.

"I don't recognize any of those," he confessed. "I've no memory for names

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—besides, these native ones are so queer. And I really paid very little attention to the map—or to uncle's instructions. You see, I never thought of anything like this happening. And uncle said he would be sure to meet me at Umtali. I must sound like an awful fool—but there's the truth of it. But look here, sir; don't you think that if I went back to Umtali and waited there uncle would come for me?"

The Major took the letter from his pocket and gave it to Mayne who gasped in astonishment as the words the Major had underlined sprang into prominence, reading:

"Don't trust Rakes and Franklin. They are at the back of a plan to rob me. Forced to write like this because I am held a prisoner by Rakes and Franklin."

"But how did you work this out?" Mayne asked excitedly. "How did you guess that the letter had a hidden meaning?"

"A number of things," the Major replied. "The postscript started me looking for a hidden message; that, and the fact that the men your uncle called friends should treat you as they did. After that it was easy. You see, he's left space between the words which make up his message and the rest of the letter."

"You don't think they've killed uncle, do you, sir?" Mayne asked.

"No. Not yet. They'd make sure about the claim first."

Mayne jumped to his feet.

"Then we must trek at once, sir," Mayne cried. "We can't waste time talking here. I mean, I can't. I—"

"Steady," the Major said softly. "Where will you go? North, south, east or west? Now think; do you think you can lead us back to the place you camped last night? If you can, Jim will be able to follow the *spoor* of Rakes and Franklin. But of course you can't do that. You were lost. So, you see, we can do nothing until we know a little bit more. Really, old chap. I know. This is Africa. There are no sign posts in the veld—at least, none that *you* can read; for the matter of that, there are none that I can read unless I know where to look for them. Now listen to me again and stop me when I say a word which sounds familiar."

HE repeated the names of the kopjes again, giving them the pronunciation of a man who was unacquainted with the language.

"Stop," Mayne cried excitedly. "Say that one again. That 'something-slopee'."

The Major smiled.

"'Em-jet-em-hi-lopee'!" he said. "Mean that one?"

Mayne nodded.

"Yes. That's the one. I'm sure that's the one. Queer name."

"Very," the Major agreed dryly. "Specially the way you say it. But it's rather musical pronounced the right way—like this."

He repeated the name, giving the vowels and consonants their proper value.

"And do you know where this, this *Umjetumshlope* is?" Mayne asked. "Is it near?"

"Yes," the Major replied. "As for its nearness—that depends on your walking ability. Jim and myself, trekking at our normal pace, could make it in a couple of days, easily. With you along, I think three days."

"But I'm in good condition," Mayne protested, "and I can walk very fast—"

"It is not exactly a matter of speed," the Major interrupted smilingly. "We travel no faster than the donkeys—and their pace is slow. But you will see. Three days, I think."

"Well, let us start, sir," Mayne cried dancing about excitedly. "We've no time to waste."

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"None," the Major agreed. "And we won't waste any, I assure you. Now go and watch Jim prepare *skoff*—food, you know—and you may learn something about camp cooking. He's an artist in that line—and in many others too."

"Food!" Mayne exclaimed in dismay. "I thought we weren't going to waste any time, sir. I—"

"We aren't," the Major interrupted him gravely. "Of course, you may have a marvelous constitution and can go without food. But I'm afraid I'm not made that way. By jove, no! My jolly old Little Mary needs sustenance now and again. My word, yes."

Mayne looked rather sheepish.

"Yes, sir. Of course," he said. "I'm afraid I'm being an awful fool."

"Just a fool—and young," the Major said lightly. "You'll get over it. Now then, will you watch Jim, or come with me to round up the donkeys?"

Mayne looked at Jim who was squatting beside the cook fire apparently engrossed in his breadmaking.

"I think I'll come with you, sir," Mayne decided. "I don't think Jim likes me."

"He's suspicious, that's all," the Major said with a laugh. "He thinks you are being used as a bait to lure me into a trap."

"I don't understand, sir," Mayne stammered.

"Of course you don't. But you see, I'm a much wanted man. There's a big reward on my head—on Jim's too."

"You mean you're criminals!" Mayne exclaimed.

"Well," the Major hedged, "let's just say that we are running away."

"Of course," Mayne said quietly, as if to himself. "That explains things."

"Explains what?" the Major demanded sharply.

"Why your voice keeps changing. I mean, sometimes you talk in a rough, coarse voice and sometimes—well, if you'll excuse me, sir—you drawl in a way that's almost affected. And—"

The Major laughed.

"I must be more careful," he chuckled. "I'll admit I've been off guard, as it were, while you have been with me. But from now on—but which is the real me? The—er—'rough, coarse' or the jolly old super-fine?"

Mayne shook his head dubiously.

"At any rate, sir," he said finally, "I'm sure that you haven't committed any serious crime."

"Decent of you, my lad. Jolly decent. I appreciate it no end. Now then, we'll get the donkeys. By that time *skoff* will be ready and we'll trek long before sun-up tomorrow."

IT WAS sunset three days later when the three men made camp in the shadow of a grotesquely shaped kopje. The sides of the hill were littered with boulders which looked snow white against the dark red of the hill. Those boulders gave the hill its name—"the-hill-of-white-stones."

A small, crystal clear stream almost encircled the base of the kopje and on its banks—about 300 yards up stream from the camping place, was a small native kraal.

Mayne hobbled painfully as he demonstrated his willingness to help, but he sighed with relief when the Major told him to go and bathe his blistered feet in the stream, and he was immensely grateful when Jim gave him a pungent smelling ointment which eased the burning pain.

"He is learning, Baas," Jim said. "*Au!* And his heart is in the right place. Perhaps if we had him with us two-three years we could make a hunter of him."

The Major nodded.

"And shall we do that, Jim?" the Major asked lightly.

The Hottentot shrugged his shoulders.

"It is for you to say, Baas. But think,

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do we desire to be instructors of the young and foolish?"

The Major shook his head.

"No," he said decisively. "He would be like a rope, binding our feet. Besides, Jim, we bring him here to join him with his uncle. Here we leave him."

"But if his uncle is dead and—"

"We will cross that river when we come to it, Jim," the Major interrupted.

Jim slowly stirred the contents of the cook pot, then he said with a chuckle:

"Today the young one learned some more words of my tongue, Baas. But I hardly recognized them when he spoke them.

"Wo-we! It sounded as if he said other things and had I not known that he spoke them in ignorance I think my anger would have been great enough to want his life. But knowing—I laughed. This he said, Baas."

And Jim repeated a phrase which, but for the slightest variation of inflexion, was similar to one with a simple and straightforward meaning. But the phrase Jim repeated was an obscene insult.

The Major smiled.

"But he is learning, Hottentot," he said. "And your tongue is a hard one for a white man to master."

"Some say we got it from the dog apes," Jim said, almost boastingly, as if that explained everything.

Mayne, carrying his boots in his hands, came back to the out span. He looked down rather impatiently at the preparations for the evening meal.

"But aren't we going to do something, sir?" he demanded.

"Of course," the Major answered placidly. *"Skoff* will be ready in ten minutes."

"I mean about uncle," Mayne retorted.

"Well?" the Major drawled the one word provocatively.

"Well! Good Lord, sir. Here we are somewhere in the vicinity of uncle's claim and we sit down calmly to have *skoff*. I—I'm sorry sir, but it does seem—"

"And what would you suggest we do, old top?" the Major interrupted.

"Well—we might scout around. We might climb that kopje. We ought to get a good view from the top and—"

"Sounds like a toppin' idea, what," the Major drawled. "Only I'm most infernally lazy, don't feel a bit like climbing. But if you feel in need of exercise, don't let me stop you. Of course, the sun has set and it'll be as dark as—er—blazes in less than half an hour—and it'll take you at least an hour to get to the top of that kopje. But don't let that stop you, old chap. We'll keep a jolly good fire blazing. You'll get a good view of that."

Mayne flushed at the Major's sarcasm.

"Well," he concluded lamely, "couldn't we go down to that kraal and ask the natives if they can tell us anything about uncle?"

"Oh! I know they *can,"* the Major said.

"Well, come on," Mayne urged; and he pulled his boots on to his swollen feet, wincing at the pain the effort caused him.

"No. Sit down," the Major told him. "Now listen to me, young feller-my-lad, while I talk to you like a Dutch uncle. You still have to learn Africa's first lesson. You cannot hurry Africa or the people of Africa. I just said that I knew the people at that kraal *can* tell us about your uncle. The question is *will* they? They won't if we try to rush 'em. Natives are like children, old man. They'll tell you everything if they're handled in the right way. They'll tell you everything if you handle 'em the wrong way, but in one case you'll be told the truth; in the other—lies. The sure way of getting the truth is by appearing uninterested in it."

Jim's voice interrupted the lesson.

"Skoff is ready, Baas," he said.

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While they ate, the blackness of night ate into the crimson of the sunset's after glow and presently night's darkness completely shrouded the veld.

Their meal finished, Mayne helped Jim for a little while, practising the *clicks* and *grunting* which seemed to make up a large part of the Hottentot's language. But when the night breeze brought to his ears from the kraal the sound of tom-toms and wild yells, Mayne joined the Major.

"It sounds very savage, sir," he said. "Are we safe? Do you think there'll be trouble."

The flickering flames of the fire lighted up the Major's face; he looked very stern.

"There's always trouble," he said slowly, "when some one gives bad liquor to natives. And that's what has happened, I think, to the people of the kraal."

Mayne stared at him wonderingly.

"But how can you say that, sir? I mean, how can you possibly know?"

"Listen!" the Major replied.

THE drums sounded yet louder. The voices of the natives grew wilder.

"I was suspicious that something was in the wind when no one came from the kraal to greet us," the Major said.

Mayne nervously toyed with the flap of his revolver holster.

"Take your hand from your revolver," the Major said. "And buckle down the flap of your holster. That'll make it more difficult for you to do any shooting."

"But surely, sir," Mayne expostulated, "the quicker I shoot the better?"

"It mustn't come to shooting," the Major said gravely. "And you've been reading too many wild romances. Shootin' is a bally poor argument. It doesn't prove anything. But a little diplomacy now—"

"Baas!" Jim joined them. He was carrying the Major's rifle. "There are hyenas creeping up on us." He gave the Major the rifle and squatted down on his haunches beside the fire.

"Bai jove!" the Major drawled as he opened the breech of his rifle and held it so that the fire lighted up the interior of the barrel. "It's beastly dirty. It needs cleaning."

He worked on the rifle industriously, and while he worked he told Mayne some amusing stories of his experiences with animals and men. He told them so well that gradually Mayne's feeling of tension vanished and he laughed in hearty appreciation of the Major's stories.

Jim was singing softly, clapping his hands to the rhythm of his song.

Suddenly Jim's singing stopped and the Major said:

"We're going to have visitors, Mayne. Keep your mouth closed unless I look at you. Don't put your hand anywhere near your revolver and do try to look intelligent—as if you understand all that is going on."

Mayne looked at him wonderingly but before he could give voice to the questions he was longing to ask, six natives came into the circle of light cast by the fire. Five of them carried assegais: the sixth, his massive form shrouded by a red blanket, carried an antique muzzle-loader.

The five squatted on their haunches on the opposite side of the fire to Jim. The red-blanketed one remained standing. His eyes were inflamed; he swayed slightly.

The Major gave no sign that he was

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conscious of the natives' presence. He continued his cleaning of the rifle, whistling softly as he did so. He ordered Jim to get him a clean rag from the pack and Jim obeyed, walking very close to the red-blanketed native yet seeming to be unaware of his presence.

The Major gave a final polish to the butt of his rifle, then loaded the magazine, very slowly, with cartridges. He worked the bolt several times and tested the action of the trigger. Then he opened the magazine cut-off, placed the rifle across his knees and discussed with Jim some details of the next day's trek.

THEN he again turned to Mayne and told him another story so irresistibly funny that Mayne conquered his fears and rolled over on his back, shouting with laughter.

The red-blanketed native tried to look ferocious but only succeeded in looking ludicrous. He was far from sure of himself. He opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water.

Mayne's laughter increased. The red-blanketed one turned to his companions for support but they, too, were grinning. Mayne's laughter was contagious.

The red blanketed one squatted on his haunches at the right of the other five.

"Sauka bona, umlungu. Good day to you, white man," he said meekly.

The others repeated the salutation.

The Major then looked at them for the first time.

"Greetings to you!" he said casually.

"Are you finding out about my uncle?" Mayne asked.

"The young white man," the Major said, as if he were translating Mayne's question, "wishes to know why grown warriors play at hide and seek in the night?"

"It is no game we played," the native said angrily. "We came out to kill."

"And you *have* killed?" the Major questioned lightly.

"No." The man's tone was sullen.

"And will not kill," the Major said that as if he were stating a fact rather than asking a question.

"And will not kill," the native answered after a slight hesitation. *"Wo-we!"* He laughed as will a child who has been detected in the act of playing a practical joke. "We thought to surprise you—but I think you knew we were there. The darkness did not hide us. Why did the young white man laugh?"

"At the folly of six warriors trying to hide from him."

The red-blanketed one took a pinch of snuff, wiping his fingers afterward on his naked, muscular thigh. He looked curiously at Mayne, then continued, "He is new to this land and he is young. Is he not frightened?"

"Is laughter a sign of fear, warrior?" the Major countered.

"What do they say, sir?" Mayne asked impatiently. "Do they know anything about my uncle? Do—"

"I haven't asked them," the Major drawled.

"But," Mayne protested, "every moment may count. For all we know Franklin and Rakes may be killing my uncle. They may have already killed him, and you sit there gassing with—"

"Steady, steady, lad," the Major interrupted. "Don't forget what I told you. We can't hurry Africa. And we can't afford to make a false move. One wrong word and these fellers'd shut up, as far as the truth's concerned, as tight as oysters."

He turned again to the natives.

"The young white man," he said, "was asking how you dared to come out against us? I told him, because I know the hearts of you black ones, that you came to kill in order that our blood would enrich the soil of your corn patches."

The red-blanketed native laughed.

"You are clever, white man," he said. "Yet the truth is hidden from

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you." He laughed again, evidently greatly elated at being able to prove the Major was wrong. "That is not why we came out against you. No. But two men came to us and gave us much *puza. Au-a!* The last has gone and my throat burns with thirst! 'Evil men follow us,' they said. 'Kill them!' And when I asked what answer I should give the Government men when I was accused of the killing, they said, 'Say these evil ones took your women by force. Say they attacked you—we also will give evidence of that. But kill these evil men and we will give you great wealth.' So you see, white man, had we killed you—as was our intention—no punishment would have befallen us."

"So you say," the Major replied slowly. "But I am a man who is not unknown. That is true, also, of my servant. Do you think then that your story, and the story of those two white men, would have been believed?"

The native's eyes bulged. His hand went up to his mouth.

"Wo-we!" he exclaimed. "That is something we had not thought of."

The Major yawned.

"This *indaba* is finished," he said. "Go back and talk to those men who put evil in your hearts and *puza* in your bellies so that you could not distinguish the true from the false. Go. We wish to sleep."

The native laughed triumphantly.

"Aye," he said. "We will talk with them—but you are wrong yet again, white man. They are not at the kraal."

"So?" the Major yawned again. "But what matter where they are? Doubtless they are many days journey from here and I have no desire to follow them."

"Tee-hee!" the native giggled. "And yet again you are wrong. They are very near. Go up and down—and the way is hard, yet not very far. Go round—and the way is easier. Where the earth yawned—there you will find them."

"You talk foolish riddles," the Major said sleepily. "Here, take this and go."

He threw a large bag of Boer tobacco to the man.

"Thanks, *inkosi*," he said gratefully as he and his companions rose to their feet. "May your sleep be soft."

"Aye," the Major replied casually, "and your path smooth." Then he added, "It may be that those two white men are listening. If they hear no firing, no yells of victory, they may perhaps think you have betrayed them and, when you go in the morning to talk with them—as you desire—they will not be there."

"True," the man replied. "But we dare not go there save when the sun is high. It is a place of evil spirits."

"But if they heard guns and yells," the Major said slowly, "they will believe what they want to believe."

The natives laughed and the red-blanketed one fired his gun into the air. The recoil almost knocked him down.

"Fire into the air, Mayne," the Major said. And Mayne, drawing his revolver, obeyed wonderingly.

The natives yelled, clashing their assegais together. Still yelling, they ran back to their kraal.

The Major laughed.

"We are dead, Mayne," he said. "So now we will turn in and go to sleep."

"But my uncle?" Mayne asked. "Did you ask them about him?"

"I asked them nothing," the Major replied.

"What?" Mayne almost shouted in his indignation.

"Hush, hush, laddie," the Major chuckled. "We're supposed to be dead. I repeat, I asked them nothing. But they told me everything—at least, nearly everything."

"Then let us trek—now!" Mayne cried.

The Major shook his head.

"No. Now we sleep."

And that was all he would say, despite Mayne's eager questions. And at last, Mayne, finding that his questions

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were addressed to a man who had no intention of answering them, sulkily unrolled his blankets and was presently fast asleep.

But the Major and Jim sat for a long time beside the fire, conversing in low whispers, endeavoring to find the answer to the riddle the native had propounded.

"Up and down—a long way, a hard way," the Major exclaimed at length in bewildered tones. "Go round—and the way is easy. What is the answer, Jim?"

"The answer, I think, is easy too," Jim said with a chuckle. *"Au-a!* That is why we could not see the answer before. It is too easy. Go round—and the way is easy. *Wo-we!* Where should he mean but the other side of the kopje—at least, that is where we will find an easier trail to the place which is somewhere hidden in the kopje."

"You're right, Jim. Of course you're right. 'Up and down'. That means we must climb the kopje and then down to where the earth yawned. He means a cave, or a crater hidden in the kopje. That must be the answer."

IN THAT mysterious hour of utter darkness which precedes the African dawn, the Major awoke. Throwing off his dew-soaked blankets he rose to his feet and was greeted by Jim who was heating coffee on the red embers of the fire.

He went down to the stream and washed himself thoroughly in the ice-cold water, then he returned and talked with Jim, outlining the plan he meant to follow. When the darkness lifted a little he awoke Mayne.

"Go and have a sluice in the river," he said. "It will freshen you up—and I have an idea you'll need all your wits about you today. How are your feet? Think you can trek?"

"They're nearly normal again, sir," Mayne said with a laugh, "thanks to Jim's ointment. And to think that I boasted about being in good condition. I'm learning things, sir."

"Well off you go. Don't be too long. *Skoff* is nearly ready. But steady, steady!" the Major added softly as Mayne floundered toward the river. "No need to tell the world we're up and—er—jolly well moving."

Half an hour later the Major and Mayne left the outspan. The Major led the way, moving silently, seeming to anticipate the pitfalls and unevenness of the veld's surface long before he came to them. Mayne followed him very closely, noisy for all his exaggerated caution. The Major, moving before him, seemed to be floating in a sea of mist which deadened his footfalls, yet Mayne's own booted feet, clanged against rocks and seemed to fill the world with harsh, metallic chimes.

A baboon *barked* a sharp challenge somewhere to his right, startling him so that he barely succeeded in strangling a cry of fear. Something got up almost directly in front of them and rushed away; for a moment there sounded a patter of hoofs—then silence.

The dew-laden air was impregnated with strong animal scents, and Mayne was suddenly conscious that there was life all about him. He wished he had a rifle with him.

"We're not hunting now," the Major said.

Mayne started. He had not realized that he had spoken his wish aloud and he wondered if the Major could read all his thoughts.

The mist rose from the ground in gray-white swirls which gradually thinned and disappeared — blown to invisible shreds by a sudden up-springing breeze. Before them now appeared the tolling veld, vast, vaguely mysterious, still veiled by the gray light of the day's birth.

The Major halted—so suddenly that Mayne bumped into him.

"Stand still, don't move," the Major

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said softly. He held his rifle at the ready.

Mayne, looking over the Major's shoulder, saw a magnificent, black-maned lion staring sleepily at them. It was not more than ten yards away.

Moments passed slowly. To Mayne they seemed like torture filled hours.

THEN the lion yawned and with one magnificent bound vanished completely from sight.

The Major led the way onward.

"A magnificent brute, wasn't he?" he said. "Fortunately for us he'd fed quite recently, and so, though he objected to our intrusion on his—er—solitude he decided not to make an issue of it. And that's just as well. I would have disliked shooting him—it would have put the men we're after on guard, for one thing." He added a moment later, "You behaved jolly well, Mayne. He was a bit terrifying, wasn't he? Nothin' like the chappies in the Zoo. Rather not. But you didn't move or make a sound."

"I couldn't," Mayne confessed. "I was too scared."

The Major laughed.

"Yes," he said. "I think you're learning."

He halted and examined the lower slopes of the kopje—they had been skirting its base—and his eyes focussed presently on a dark shadow just ahead.

"Yes," he drawled, more to himself than Mayne, "I have a feeling that is the place. And now we won't be long."

In a more decisive tone he said to Mayne:

"You will wait here, under cover of that bush. Do you understand? They are *orders*."

Mayne looked around dubiously, rather expecting to see the lion again.

Then he nodded. "I'll obey," he said.

He watched the Major vanish into the dark shadow. It was really a narrow crack in the rocky wall of the kopje. It looked to the Major almost like a man-made passage leading back into the heart of the hill.

This passageway, the Major discovered, presently opened out onto a crater-like depression—a valley hidden in the centre of the kopje. And there, close to a clump of stunted trees, were two huts, crudely built. About them was a stone walled enclosure of a strangely irregular shape. In that enclosure a horse and mules milled about restlessly.

From one of the huts sounded a yawn and a man's voice, high-pitched, said whiningly:

"Get up, Rakes. It's your turn to get *skoff*."

The Major dropped to the ground and crawled forward, making for a large boulder half way across the crater. He meant to hide behind that and wait for the men to show themselves. There was no need to rush things, he thought. He reached the boulder and crouched down under its cover just as a man emerged from one of the huts. He was short and over-plump with the outward appearance of a good-natured baboon—except for his eyes.

"I imagine he's got the—er—disposition of a wart-hog," the Major decided. "And, really, I'm insulting the wart-hog. I suppose he is Rakes."

Low painful groans now sounded from the other hut and a voice called feebly:

"Water! Give me water, you swine!"

The fat man laughed as he turned toward the hut.

"You can have all the water you want,

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Smithers," he shouted, "as soon as you've told us where the reef is."

"I'll see you in hell first." The answer came back with great spirit.

"You're an old fool, Smithers," Rakes growled. "Franklin's losing patience with you—so am I. If you don't tell us today we're going to call in a few niggers to help us open your mouth. They're clever at making obstinate men talk. And there ain't a chance in the world of anybody rescuing you—so don't count on that. As I told you last night, the niggers killed your nephew and the Nosey Parker who picked him up. We arranged that—but nobody's goin' to be able to prove it."

The Major smiled.

RAKES now had turned and was coming directly toward him. For a moment the Major thought he was discovered. In any case, Rakes had only to come a little further and the Major would be hidden no longer. So he rose swiftly to his feet, his rifle levelled at the pit of Rakes' stomach, his finger on the trigger.

"Hands up," he said curtly. "And don't make a sound."

Rakes' hands shot above his head, but the Major was puzzled. There was no fear or surprise in the man's eyes.

"Turn round," the major said, "and back slowly to me. And if you're thinking of playin' tricks, why don't, there's a good chap. My finger is deuced light on the trigger, give you my word it is."

"Is it likely I'd try to play any tricks, mister?" Rakes expostulated. "Only I hope you ain't goin' to hold me responsible for what my partner does. There'll be fur flying if he happens to come out of that hut and sees his pal is being held up by a claim-jumper. He's hot tempered, my pal is."

"Then I must try to cool it for him," the Major drawled as he came from behind the boulder and crouching down so that he was sheltering behind the other's bulky body. "Now we'll go and call on him. Yes. I'm sorry I haven't a visiting card with me—but you must announce me. Now, if you don't mind, I'll rest the muzzle of my rifle against your spine. There — feel it? Well, that's where a bullet will enter if you try any tricks. Now then, lead me to the hut."

As he spoke a low whistle sounded and a heavy weight struck him between the shoulders, sending him off his balance. His trigger finger contracted instinctively but Rakes, who had flung himself sideways to the ground at the sound of the whistle, was unharmed.

Rakes sat up, panting, and pointing a mocking finger at the Major.

"Hands up, mister!"

The Major pivoted slowly and saw a thin, sad-faced man sitting on a boulder, covering him with a revolver.

Rakes rose to his feet and took the Major's rifle and revolver.

"He's clever," Rakes wheezed, "but he ain't clever enough for us, is he, Franklin?"

"No!" that man agreed in a mournful voice.

"Clever enough," the Major retorted easily. "Clever enough to see you two Johnnies hanged for murder."

"Well now," Rakes said mockingly. "Whom have we here, do you think, Franklin? Talks like a bloomin' dude, don't he? But he talks murder. We ain't done no murder, mister."

"You killed old Smithers," the Major replied. "You left his nephew—a helpless greenhorn—to die on the veld. But for a bit of luck—"

"Well, he ain't dead," Rakes interrupted. "Leastways, not so far as we know—unless the niggers got him last night. But I imagine not—seeing as how you're alive and kicking. As for Smithers; if he dies, it won't be our fault. You see, he's got some information we want pretty badly. And we've got

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the food and water he wants. We're willing to make a swap—but the old fool's stubborn."

"He's weakenin' though," Franklin added complacently.

"You are bad hats, aren't you," the Major commented. "'Pon my word, I shall report you to the jolly old police. First you kidnap an old man, then you desert young Mayne. Then you bribe—er—natives to kill me, Mayne and my native servant. They got Mayne and my servant.

"I managed to escape by the well known skin of my teeth."

"I think you're lying, mister," Franklin said mournfully. "Not that it matters. If them other two ain't dead—they will be soon. You too."

"You mean you'd murder us in cold blood?" the Major questioned.

"Don't keep harping on murder, mister," Rakes grinned. "It ain't a nice word."

"If a snake bit you," Franklin added, "that wouldn't be murder. And there's a lot of snakes in this crater, mister. So a thing like that can be easily arranged."

"What's your name, mister?" Rakes asked.

"Major—Aubrey St. John Major. You have heard of me, I hope?"

THE two men started and looked at each other uneasily. Then Franklin laughed.

"You ain't the Major. Why he—"

"I assure you," the Major drawled, "that this bally beard and what not really hides those very well known features. As for the clothes—don't be misled by the old proverb about fine feathers. Despite my—er—shall we say undress uniform?—I'm really no end of a chap. Quick brain, wonderful in an emergency an' all that, you know."

"Oh, stow your gab," Franklin said coarsely.

Rakes tittered.

"At that, Franklin," he said, "he might be the Major. He talks like him and now I look at him close he ain't unlike."

Franklin nodded.

"You're right, Rakes," he said. "Well, I ain't taking any chances. Less now than before. So you're the Major, are you? I've heard plenty about you. Supposed to be a *slim* customer. Always a-poking your nose into things what don't concern you. Well, this is where I put an end to your last bit of interfering."

His eyes narrowed. The Major's eyes were on Franklin's trigger finger. He knew that he was facing a cold, remorseless killer and at the first sign of tension in that finger the Major was going to act.

All three men were deathly still.

Then Rakes laughed, putting an end to the atmosphere of suspense.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry, Franklin," he said. "If he is the Major, he ain't so clever as they make out. And, anyway, we'd best find out what he knows before we kiss him good-bye."

Franklin nodded.

"That's right," he said. "You see, mister, we're *really* clever. We don't take chances, and we don't like uninvited guests. So one of us is always on guard at the entrance there. See? I was on watch this morning and heard you coming down the passage in time to warn my partner. So he was ready to play a little game for you. You thought there was two men in the hut—but it was only Rakes making believe. I laughed when you crawled over to the boulder—not but what you didn't do it damned well."

The Major looked chagrined.

"Yes," he admitted. "I'm afraid you were too clever for me. But I say, how did you know young Mayne had been picked up and was on your—er—trail?"

"Seen you," Franklin answered. "There is a good view from the top of the kopje."

"Oh, yes, of course. How simple it all is. But what would you have done if—say—two mounted policemen had found Mayne and come here?"

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"This is out of their territory," Franklin snapped.

"Perhaps," the Major replied slowly. "But I think in cases of emergency—and this is one, you know—they'd forget the boundary line. At any rate, it was with that hope I sent Mayne to Umtali with my native. I think the police will be along in due course."

"THAT'S a good yarn," Franklin said with a laugh. "But even if it is true—and I don't believe it is—it'll be two or three days before the police can get here. By that time we'll be in a position so that we won't care. You'll be dead, so will old man Smithers. Your donkeys and kit will have vanished. The niggers'll see to that. And what's Mayne's story going to count against ours. But blast the young swine, we ought to have killed him in the first place!"

"Forget it," Rakes said uneasily. "Killing a man here is one thing. Killing him on the veld is another. But what are we going to do with the Major?"

"We'll keep him for a bit," Franklin said. "He can do a bit of digging for us and so on. So up to the huts you go, Mister Major. And keep your hands up above your head. Come on. Get a move on. You look half dazed."

"As a matter of fact," the Major said slowly, "I was lost in admiration of the way in which you have planned things. It looks as if only a tremendous surprise could defeat you, 'pon my word it does."

"And no one's going to take *us* by surprise," Franklin boasted.

"Well, as to that," the Major drawled, "I don't think you ought to be so sure. I've been planning a little surprise myself for you. For instance, while we have been talking here—and I never, or hardly ever, talk without a purpose—my warriors have been posting themselves around the crater. I have only to give the signal and—well, my dear fellows, they'd blow you off the face of the jolly old earth."

Both men laughed disbelievingly, but they could not hide the look of unease in their eyes and for a moment their gaze left the Major as they glanced furtively behind them.

And in that moment of inattention the Major acted. Quick as a striking snake his right hand came down and the side edge of his palm struck the wrist of Franklin's revolver hand, causing that man to open his fingers with a cry of pain and drop the weapon. At the same moment the Major's left hand thudded down on the crown of Rakes' large helmet, smashing it down over his eyes.

Before either man could recover the Major had recovered his rifle and Franklin's revolver.

"Now, my two beauties," the Major drawled, "the time has come to talk of many things. Don't you agree. This is a case of the biters bitten or he who laughs last, jolly well laughs last. Take off your belt, Rakes, and strap your friend's feet together."

In sullen silence Rakes obeyed.

"Now you do the same for Rakes, Franklin," the Major ordered. "Tut, tut, dear heart, not such bad language, please! And now, just to prove that I was not altogether bluffing, hold your helmet far above your head, Franklin. That's right. Now." He whistled. A shot sounded and the helmet was whipped from Franklin's nerveless fingers by a bullet which pierced the crown.

"Good shootin', Jim," the Major called. "The *indaba* is ended. Get the young Baas. He waits outside the ravine."

And Jim, grinning happily, rose from behind the cover of a boulder at the other end of the crater and hurried to obey his Baas' orders.

"You see," the Major explained in a provokingly patronizing drawl, "I never take chances, dear boys. While I came into your—er sanctum by the front door,

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Jim came in by the back, as it were. I mean he climbed the steep side of the kopje—and you never suspected it, did you? Of course you helped by very kindly listening to my conversation. But then, I find—and I hope you won't accuse me of boasting—people so generally do. Now I think we will go to the huts. Poor Smithers must be very hungry."

He laughed merrily as the two men, each clutching desperately to their trouser tops in order to hold them up, made their way to the huts by a series of awkward jumps.

ABOUT an hour later the Major, Mayne and Smithers—an age-grizzled, wiry old prospector—were eating one of Jim's splendidly concocted meals. Smithers was very weak, but his spirit had been unbroken by the treatment he had received and strength came back to him with every mouthful. There was no need for the Major to warn him to eat slowly—he had to; the few teeth he had compelled him to masticate very slowly.

"I've only got myself to blame," he said. "I met up with them two when I was on my way to Umtali and meet you, Frank. They got me drunk and I'm afraid I talked too much. Boasting about my find and all that, like a silly old fool. So they made me a prisoner and made me write that letter to you, Frank. It's a good job you were clever enough to read the message I'd hidden—"

"I wasn't," Mayne interrupted. "I couldn't have done a thing without the Major—"

"Never mind that," the Major said. "Go on with your story, Smithers. It's interesting."

"There's not much more to it," said Smithers. "Next thing I knew was when they came back to where they'd left me and told me how they'd treated Frank. They had the map and they brought me along to this place where I've had my headquarters for a good long time. It's a safe place. The niggers leave me alone and it's a bit off the trail of the white travelers.

"Well, having got me here, they tried to get me to tell 'em where the reef was. I wouldn't. They beat me. They tried torture. They kept me without water an' put a lot of salt into my food. But I didn't tell 'em—and I wouldn't tell 'em!"

"No," the Major agreed. "I don't think you would. "Well," he rose to his feet, "the sun's rising high. It is time Jim and myself were on our way with Messrs. Rakes and Franklin. I'll take them into Umtali—and hand 'em over to the police johnnies. You can appear to give evidence when you ride in to register your find. And, if you take my advice, you'll lose no time about that."

"I won't," Smithers said. "Me and nephew'll ride in tomorrow. But don't go yet—we haven't had a chance of sayin' thank you."

The Major laughed.

"And I don't intend to. No, really."

A few moments later he and Jim and the two criminals were ready for the trail. The Major was riding Franklin's horse. He left Rakes' mount for Mayne to ride.

"Major——" Mayne began hesitatingly.

The Major turned, a half-mocking inquiring light in his eyes.

"Well?" he questioned.

"We want you to have a share in this reef," Mayne said excitedly.

"That's right, Major," Smithers said warmly. "We'll go half shares. Get off a minute and I'll show you where to peg a claim."

"You don't have to—thanks all the

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same," the Major chuckled. "I mean, I know where the reef is."

"What?" Smithers said incredulously.

"Yes. But of course," the Major replied.

"That be damned for a tale," Smithers snorted. "Nobody knows where that reef is but me."

"Mustn't make rash statements," the Major said reprovingly. "Now I'll tell you where it is. When I saw that cattle *scherm*—and what sane man would build a *scherm* that crazy shape unless he were mad or had something to hide!—I began to get suspicious. Of course you built that stone wall to cover up the surface outcrop, didn't you?"

"Well I'll be blowed!" Smithers said. "But you're right, Major. And have you pegged a claim, Major?"

The Major shook his head. "No, thanks. Really, I don't need it. 'Pon my word, I don't."

"Well, you can't stop me from pegging one for you," Smithers said obstinately.

"No. I'm afraid I can't," the Major sighed. "But look at our two desperadoes! Don't they look ill? Something they've eaten, no doubt."

HE and Smithers and Mayne laughed at the expressions on the faces of Rakes and Franklin. To think they had been so close to the object of their crime was too much for them and they miserably obeyed the Major's curt command to "Trek!"

As they left the crater, passing through the passageway to the open veld, the Major explained to Jim the extent of the gratitude of Mayne and his uncle.

"At least," Jim said in mollified tones, "they didn't even give you the thanks of a bee."

"No. Unless the answer is 'Honey', Jim."

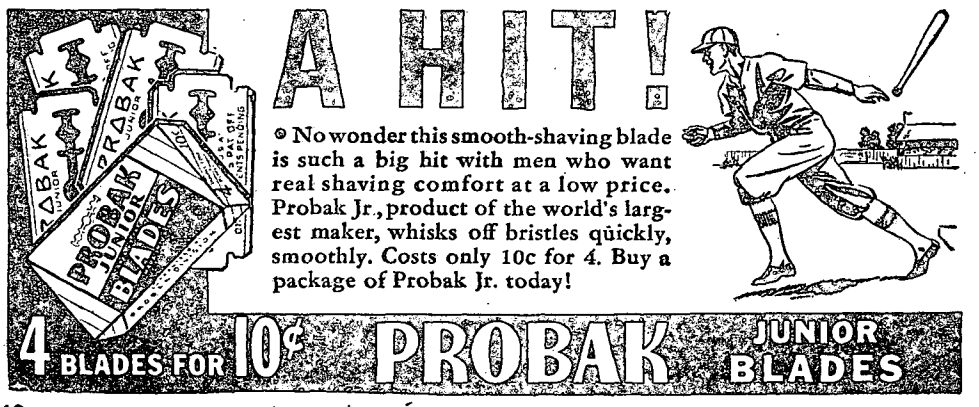
"And it isn't, Baas," Jim chuckled.

"Then what is it?"

The Hottentot's answer made the Major sway in the saddle with laughter.

"Oh! That's good. That's very good. I must tell our two friends."

"I say," he called to Rakes and Franklin who were walking dejectedly behind the two pack mules which carried their provisions. They were roped together, their hands tied behind their backs, in such a way that they could walk unimpeded, but escape impossible. Not that they even thought of escape. They were resigned to their lot. "I say," the Major said again, "I never did really thank you for listening to me so attentively. Or, perhaps it would be more correct to say that I gave you the—er—thanks of a bee. Its sting, you know! Rippin', isn't it?"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The Fur Traders out of Fort Assiniboine Know How to Hate and to Fight

WITHOUT BENEFIT OF LAW

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Horse Trouble," "Once at Apache Crossing," etc.

I

ARTICLES OF WAR

NEVER in the memory of any trapper or *coureur de bois* had there been such a rendezvous as this. Upwards of a hundred buckskin clad men had wintered at the North West Company's new post on the Red River of the North. The break-up was at hand now; time for beaver doings!

His stalwart shoulders square with purpose, Kyle Maddox thrust through the clamorous groups of swarthy hunters and wrangling, dark-visaged French *Wahkeitchas,* and strode with quickening step toward a rear door of the post. Turning

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the corner he stopped abruptly, his weather-tanned, rocky face hardening.

Delphine Valcour, the daughter of old Baptiste, the factor, stood in the doorway, but she was not alone. Laughing Sam Clymer, as big as Kyle himself, and better looking, stood there with her. Delphine saw Maddox then, and with all the coquetry of her race, she flashed him a dazzling smile, though she was well aware of the bitter rivalry between these two men for her favor.

Clymer took his shoulder away from the door-jamb and turned to Kyle with pretended surprise, his keen glance measuring him from head to foot.

"How, Kyle!" he greeted, with an innocence that failed to hide his hostility. His eyes returned to the other's new parfleche moccasins, the sagging powder-horn at his waist and the long rifle slanting in his grasp. "Reckon you're figurin' to make tracks."

Kyle nodded curtly. Clymer caught him up, cheerfully loquacious. "Where you headin' for—up the Caribou, Lac la Ronge? Athabasca says hair'll be long on the Saskatchewan this season."

"I'm trapping new country," Kyle evaded. His mind was scarcely on what he said, taking in Delphine's small, graceful form and the rich life under her dusky olive features.

Sam Clymer took fire at the mention of new country. The rivalry between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay people was keen, the voyageurs of the one sometimes even poisoning the waters claimed by the other, so that large areas were unprofitable. But trappers were not to be stopped by such devices. 'Poleon Cervais, Laughing Sam declared, had discovered a rich valley three days north of the Pelican Forks. Heaps of beaver and marten there—'Poleon's packs had weighed down his canoe to the gunwales, last fall. Hector McKenzie knew a creek on the Moose he was going to hit this year—

"Where's yours?" Sam broke off to ask Maddox curiously.

"Don't know as I could direct a man right to it," Kyle answered dryly.

"You're pretty sharp, old coon!" Clymer retorted skeptically. "You know, all right. Mebby you'd rather have me ask your brother Rufe," he added, chuckling. "I'll git it out of the boy!"

Kyle stiffened. "Don't you try it," he said flatly.

"I hear young Jules is sidin' you this trip," Laughing Sam persisted, ignoring the other's tone. "What're you tryin' to do—beat my time with Delphine?" Jules was Delphine's brother.

Maddox's mouth tightened at this baiting. "You've nothing to fear, Clymer. Jules is your friend, not mine." Of no mind to be shunted away from his errand here, he continued, "Delphine, I'd like to speak to you for a moment."

CLYMER, instead of taking his cue and retiring, merely moved aside. The anger brewing in Kyle boiled up instantly. He did not propose to say goodby to this girl in Clymer's presence. Delphine could have saved the situation, but with conscious deviltry declined to help him.

"So, you go so soon, Kyle?" she exclaimed. "Assiniboine be very lonely place without you. But if you must go, keep your powder dry—and mind your hair!"

It was said sincerely enough; so much so that Laughing Sam pricked up his ears. He knew now where Kyle was heading. North and west of Fort Assiniboine lay little danger of anything save empty traps. But to the south, across the line in the Dakotah country, where hair was longer, waited the warlike Assiniboines and Gros Ventres.

Had Delphine's words been a slip, or had she meant to tell him?

Maddox did not propose to be dismissed in this summary fashion. His skin darkening, he turned to the other man. "I'm

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asking you to leave us to ourselves, Clymer."

"Delphine ain't asked me to go. Suppose we leave it up to her, whether I do or not," Clymer retorted. Stepping away from the wall against which he had lounged, he hitched up his belt, his black eyes flashing defiance.

Kyle leaned his rifle against the logs and appeared to gather his lean, rawhide frame together. "Sam," he said clearly, "roll your hump away from here, before I take the bark off you!"

Sam grinned wolfishly. "So that's the way your stick floats, hey? Fly at it, old hoss!"

Kyle was at him with a rush. Laughing Sam got himself set. They met with a smashing impact of solid blows.

Scarcely had the fight commenced before it attracted notice. In a moment they were surrounded by a motley crowd.

"Stomp him doon, Kyle! Waugh!" yelled a bearded Scotch trapper.

"Cone on, Sam—shovel it into heem!" cried a friend of Clymer's.

At a mallet-like stroke from his adversary, Kyle measured his length in the dust. He was up in a second; Clymer charging him with hurling fists. Teeth clenched, Maddox plunged to meet that smiling face, conscious that Delphine's dancing, alert eyes followed every move.

A moment later, Clymer, laughing no more, his visage a mask of swift rage, sprawled against the legs of the encircling watchers, hurled there by a crushing blow. There was a fiery patch around his left eye, darkening rapidly, when he scrambled up.

"Yank the traps on him, Kyle! Make him come!" young Rufe Maddox bawled truculently. With Jules Valcour, his partner, he had rushed up to witness the fight.

Other instructions and encouragements were shouted with enthusiastic abandon. Neither combatant gave any sign that he heard as they milled about like enraged grizzly bears in the throes of a death struggle. It was not long, however, before both came to the conviction that this thing could not be settled with fists. Clymer leaped back to land on his toes, light as a panther.

"Cut beaver!" he yelled, and his Green River knife flashed out.

"Cut beaver!" echoed a fierce voice at Kyle's shoulder, taking up the challenge for him. Stepping close, Jules Valcour thrust his own thick-bladed skinning knife into Maddox's hands.

NO ONE felt more surprise at this unexpected development than Kyle. He shot a questioning look at the boy. Jules' cold, set face as he stared grimly across at Clymer, said that he was undeniably sincere. Kyle gave it up, bringing all his attention to bear on his antagonist.

For a moment they circled each other warily in the hush that fell. Suddenly a thunderous roar sounded from the trade-room door. An immense, chunky man with yard-wide shoulders, a waving beard and piercing eyes, put in an abrupt appearance.

"It's Old Bat!" a trapper exclaimed warningly. "He's got that damned two-shoot gun in his fist!"

Wrath in his mien and a scatter-gun in his grasp, Bat Valcour, undisputed lord of this isolated trading post, stepped forward. The squaws and half-breed Cree children flew for safety to the far corners of the fort; the trappers and red-sashed voyageurs drew apart, grinning broadly.

"*Sacré!*" Old Bat bellowed at the fighting men, approaching them without any weakening of intent. "Stop dis damn-foolishness! Mabbe you like I blow you to hell, bagosh!"

Kyle and Clymer fought on, oblivious of anything but the venom of their rivalry. Delphine remained standing in the door, her lively gaze fastened on them.

"*Sapristi,* I feex you both!" the burly factor sputtered. The shotgun came up,

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leveled at their legs. Its hammer clicked.

Laughing Sam was the first to fall back hastily, at that ominous sound. "Hold off, Bat!" he cried in alarm. Then suddenly the habitual grin flashed through. "Hell, you didn't believe we was in earnest?" he scoffed incredulously, turning to Maddox for corroboration.

Raucous mirth from the trappers greeted this sally. Kyle returned his look stonily.

"You bat ma life, me—I'm een earnest!" Old Bat insisted. "You fellers owe me money. Who pay me if you keel each othaire, eh?" His raking eyes admonished his daughter.

Not a whit abashed, Delphine laughed in a silvery way. "Take their knives away and let them finish it, *mon pere,*" she suggested.

Old Bat glared his displeasure. Clymer chuckled in agreement with her mood, and Delphine turned on him a look of approval which not even Kyle could mistake.

Bitter disappointment gnawed the latter. He saw his own prospects grown poorer than ever. What would they be on his return following three months' absence?

Anger born of desperation gripped him. Brusquely he stepped close to Delphine. "You've had your fun, you little wildcat," he muttered. "I hope it'll last you till I get back this summer—"

Delphine was nearer to being his at that moment than she had ever been. She looked at him thoughtfully and seemed about to speak, but he did not wait. Turning to his brother, standing among the trappers, he called, "Rufe! Throw your possibles together, you and your partner; and round up the mules. We're pulling out right now!"

THE fur brigade was leaving Fort Assiniboine. North and south the batteaux and heavy-laden canoes manned by Crees and Mandans, and French-Canadian *Voyageurs* bright with kerchief and *ceinture-fleche,* pulled out upon the flooding tide of the Red, the deep-throated *chansons* rolling over the water. From Nipigon to the Rockies, and from the muddy Missouri to the headwaters of the Mackenzie, these men would lay traps and set snares for mink and marten, beaver and silver fox.

Riding across the high prairies, Kyle Maddox found time to consider a matter which had puzzled him since its occurrence an hour before. Rufe and his *camerade,* Jules Valcour, rode near at hand. Pushing up beside the latter, Kyle said:

"I can't understand it. You've always favored Sam Clymer; and yet when he flashed a knife on me, you couldn't get your own in my hand fast enough. Why did you do it?"

The smoldering passion of an implacable hatred leaped alive in Jules' obsidian eyes. "Because I hate Sam Clymer's guts—that's why!"

His sincerity could not be questioned; yet Kyle remained perplexed. Valcour's answer merely substituted one mystery for another. "What for? When did he ever throw the gravel into you?"

Jules stared inscrutably for a moment, then dropped his eyes. "That's my business," he muttered.

"It sure is," Kyle agreed. "Keep the reason to yourself, if you feel that way." Nor could he find anything to say which would draw an explanation out of the other.

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Dropping back until he rode alone, Kyle Maddox's thoughts turned to Delphine, and he told himself that nothing but the necessity of his calling could have torn him away from Assiniboine. With his brother and Jules, he was riding south into the Dakotah country until the time came for him to turn off alone. The going was easy enough till midafternoon. Then they got into the rough.

More than once Kyle had to ask Jules to help with the fractious pack mules. Valcour paid no attention. Already adept at the Indian gambling game of Hands, he had fallen to practicing with the cherry stone. An irresponsible young adventurer, handsome and dark in the French way, his hands flashed before him as he rode along, to the exclusion of every other interest.

Skill at Hands played a large part in every gathering of trappers, supplanting all other forms of gambling. It settled conclusively matters large and small and even decided the ownership of mules, canoes, rifles, traps; the object thing, that one man rubbed his hands together, a cherry pit between the palms. Suddenly the hands were snatched apart, clenched, and the task of the bettor, watching these maneuvers closely, was to guess which fist concealed the stone.

Rufe's interest in the endless game took no account of his elder brother's impatience. He jogged along beside Jules, their heads together. Kyle said nothing, waiting for them to tire of this foolishness.

But it went on the next day, and the next, the pair seeming more engrossed than ever. Suspecting them of gambling their possessions, Kyle warned them sharply to put an end to it.

THEY ignored him, riding a little apart and bickering occasionally. It came in the end to an open quarrel, as he had guessed it would. Thrusting his crop-eared Indian cayuse between them, he rasped, "This thing has gone far enough! What is it this time? I'm settling it here and now—and for good!"

"That'll suit me!" Jules cried. "All I want is my rights!"

"Nonsense!" Rufe whipped out angrily. "We was playin' Hands to pass the time. He thinks he won my mules and traps and gun, and—just to keep it goin'—even my trappin' time. Now he says I'm workin' for him and have got to do as he says!" He snorted his contempt at such simplicity.

Jules flew into a passion. He would have hurled himself at Rufe had not Kyle stood between them. "You lost fair and square, now you want to run out on me! Hell's full of such take-backs!"

The quarrel went on, poisonous and shrill, despite all Kyle could do to stop it. But that night at camp he found opportunity to speak to Rufe in private.

"I advised you in the first place not to throw in with Jules," he pointed out. "Let him go it alone, and come with me."

Rufe said no. "I can handle Jules," he protested. "I'd have done it today if you hadn't horned in—"

"You'll come walking into rendezvous this fall, afoot, and I'll have to stake you to an outfit again," Kyle retorted.

But Rufe seemed bound to go on with the young Frenchman. With the boy's best interests at heart, Kyle persisted even after Valcour came back to the fire.

"Throw in with me, and I'll promise you will be able to make a trip out to Montreal this summer."

Jules, looking at them intently, and perfectly aware of what they were discussing, laughed with sudden vindictiveness.

"Go ahead with him," he scoffed. "I can get along without you."

"You needn't play that tune, Valcour!" Kyle put in. "You were glad enough to hitch up with Rufe in the beginning!"

Jules stared his hostility at the older man. "I hadn't taken his brother into account," he returned coolly.

"You'll find you have to now, if you

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don't want your hide stretched over a stump!" Kyle blazed.

Eyes wicked, Jules fingered the knife at his beaded belt.

"Who'll stretch it—" he began, only to break off at the sound of a sinister twang from the darkness. Before anyone could move, an arrow flashed across the fire and buried itself in his shoulder.

Simultaneously an ear-splitting war-whoop shattered the quiet of the creek bottom.

"Injuns!"

With the ejaculation, Kyle scattered the fire with a single kick. Snatching up their rifles, they probed the encircling gloom. At a rustle in the willows, Kyle's weapon spat flame. A screech was the answer, followed by another curdling war-cry.

"Here's hell to pay, and no pitch hot!" Rufe jerked out grimly.

"Hump yourself and bring in our animals!" Kyle snapped, throwing their packs into a barricade. "We wouldn't have been jumped if we'd kept our eyes open and our mouths shut!"

IN SHORT order the horses and mules were tethered, close-bunched, near at hand. Crouching in meagre cover, the three maintained a hawklike vigilance. At long intervals one of the long rifles crashed out its challenge. Once Rufe sprang up with a wrathy cry, and, his hunting knife out, leaped on a skulking figure which crept toward the staked animals. There was a violent struggle for a minute or two. It ceased abruptly.

"Did you keep your hair, Rufe?" Kyle cried anxiously.

"Sure I did," came the jaunty answer. "I split that nigger's medicine. Waugh!" He crawled back carrying a dripping scalplock.

That ended the brush for a time, but Kyle said the savages were lurking near. While Rufe stood watch, he removed the arrowhead from Valcour's shoulder, daubed the wound with bear's grease, and bound it up. For long hours they lay in readiness.

Dawn found them hastily throwing their possibles aboard the mules. They lost no time in pushing on, a new mood on them, their quarrels forgotten.

The tracks of a small scout-party of Assiniboines were found, but there was no new attack. It was Kyle's surmise that the Indians had preferred to avoid continuing an encounter they were not certain of winning.

Late that day they came to the point where Kyle meant to turn off. He pulled in his cayuse for a last word with Rufe.

"You haven't changed your mind?" he asked.

"No," Rufe answered him. "I'm trappin' Brulé Creek."

Kyle's nod was expressionless. "You're cuttin' your own stick. I've said my piece. So long."

He kicked the cayuse ahead on the lone trail, his pack mules, fastened to the tail of his mount, following after.

II

DEAD MAN'S GAMBLE

IT WAS a long spring for Kyle Maddox, left alone with his thoughts on a lonely creek among lofty, grass-crowned buttes. The fact that his beaver packs waxed fat; that he saw Indian sign only twice, and with caution escaped discovery both times, meant little. Huddled before his fire of nights, a pipe clenched in his teeth, his mind persisted in turning back toward Fort Assiniboine.

How long had Laughing Sam Clymer stayed on at the post, and what progress had he made in Delphine Valcour's affections? What had been the upshot of that last episode which Old Bat had so inopportunely interrupted? There was no sure answer to these questions; but Kyle concluded grimly that matters could not possibly be so bad but what they would be worse, when Jules reached home in June.

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with the story of his experience with the Maddoxes.

Nor was Kyle by any means certain that Clymer needed this help. Sam was a plausible scamp, readily ingratiating himself with his good humor and his jokes, his endless willing favors; tying others to him with the strong bonds of obligation. Or so Kyle saw him. Could Delphine be trusted, shrewd as she was, to see through the wiles of the man?

One day late in March he suddenly came across strange moccasin tracks in the sand of a creek branch a dozen miles from camp. That they were fresh was attested by the fact that the water which filled the indentations was still muddy.

Before he had time to crouch and scan his surroundings, a rifle shot rang out a hundred yards away in the brush. Death fluttered past his face with a wicked whine. Sprawling on the sand, he wormed his way to a nearby rock. A moment later he was among the willows, trying to get a glimpse of his assailant.

Knowing better than to attribute the accuracy of that shot to an Indian, his face hardened as he crawled forward. What white man could want his life? A picture of Sam Clymer rose in his mind. Was that the explanation?

At a slight movement ahead in the brush, he threw up his rifle and blazed away. The willows parted; a buckskin-clad figure sprang into sight and darted away with the speed of a deer. Just before the man disappeared, he turned his head for a backward look. Kyle got a flash of his face. It was Jules Valcour.

For a second, surprise froze him in his tracks. Dropping his rifle then, and drawing his knife, he lunged after the other, savage wrath in his heart.

It was a fruitless chase. There was none fleeter than Jules, even among the Indian camps of the north. Kyle got a glimpse of him, ten minutes later, disappearing over a rise; but no more.

Turning back to pick up his rifle, Maddox asked himself what the other's object had been. Had Jules intended to kill him; or had he fired without knowing at whom he was aiming?

Kyle got his answer when, the following morning, he found three of his traps smashed beyond reclaiming. He was sure now that, chased off the creek so promptly, his main object a failure, Valcour had elected to vent his malice in this fashion. Unable to make anything more of it, he kept a wary watch for several days, without result.

THE last week in April, a band of over a hundred Assiniboines, with their travois-laden ponies, filed into the creek bottom; plainly intent on summering in this quiet spot. Kyle watched them from a high butte. Whatever he had intended doing, he found his mind made up for him now. Between that day and the next, he lifted his traps, broke camp and set off across the prairie, his mules laden with packs of prime beaver.

For two days he narrowly avoided other bands of Indians moving into the country. Caution having thrown him far to the west, he set his course for Brulé Creek, thinking to pick up Jules and Rufe; intent on settling accounts with the former, and curious to know how the latter had fared.

"Reckon it'll be poor bull for him," he mused. "If he's stuck with it, the Frenchman has probably cleaned him out of everything but his pants, and got him down to smoking kinni-kinnik."

Two days later he moved down the Brulé.

Reaching the vicinity of the beaver

lodges, he looked around for sign of a camp, and found none. The creek bottom was well wooded, and he knew that Rufe

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and his partner would have thrown up a shelter of some sort. A vague sense of disaster strong in him, he proceeded. He had not gone far when he sniffed the dead odor of charred wood.

On the instant the pony's ears jerked forward. Kyle slid out of the saddle, rifle in hand. Fire meant men—red or white. Advancing cautiously, a violent ejaculation was torn from his lips.

In front of him on the ground, picked clean by the wolves, lay the skeleton of a man, the fleshless bones shining white. Bending down to examine his grisly find, Kyle Maddox's lips went flat and hard. A worn gold ring, still encircling one of the finger-bones, made identification unmistakable. He knew he was gazing on all that was left of his young brother, Rufe.

A few yards away he saw the charred ruins of a log lean-to. A dozen questions leaped at him. Was some war-party of braves responsible? And what had happened to Jules Valcour?

Nothing remained of the shelter that offered a clue. A few traps, an ax-head, lay in the ashes. The beaver pelts had been either stolen or destroyed. Even Rufe's rifle was missing. Hastily Kyle quartered the creek bottom; and when at length he desisted, he was more puzzled than ever.

He had found no sign of unshod Indian ponies anywhere near.

He returned to the heap of bleaching bones. There remained the chance that some mark on them would tell him what he wanted to know. The round, unbroken skull, cleaned by ants, had not been tomahawked. No bullet hole broke its symmetry. Shaking his head, he turned the ribs over, at last to hold one up and regard it attentively. A nick had been cut in the bone, the jutting fragment broken out.

"Knifed!" he muttered, a steely look flashing into his eyes.

Dropping the rib, he stood up, pondering who could have done this thing. During his coursing for sign, he had found no second skeleton, as he might have done had a war party, creeping up, surprised the two trappers. Whatever had happened, Jules Valcour had escaped Rufe's fate.

Unbidden, a question leaped at him that strung every nerve taut. Had Jules Valcour murdered Rufe?

In vain he tried to reject the idea. Thought of Delphine assailed him and completed his misery. Telling himself there must be some further sign that would make this mystery clear, he anxiously went over the ground again, seeking for any small indication that he might have overlooked.

At a point near the skeleton he stopped, arrested, as his glance fell on a curled fragment of birch-bark, charred at the edges. How had it come here? It was some distance from the burned lean-to.

A GRUNT escaped him as he snatched it up. There was nothing on the exposed side, but carefully smoothing it out, he saw scrawled characters within. Some of the message had been burned away, but he made out a few words, scratched with the blade of a knife.

"and me was
playing Hands He cheate
when I called him
nailed me Get him Kyle"

That was all. And yet it was enough to bring boiling rage and hatred into Kyle Maddox's heart.

With a bleak face, he swiftly reconstructed what must have occurred. He pictured the gambling game in the lean-to, the detected cheating, the pantherish scuffle. Slipping his knife between Rufe's ribs and leaving him for dead, the assassin had hastily taken what he wanted; then, firing the shelter, had stolen off. Rufe had revived, found the bark at hand, and

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scrawled his message. The fire closing in on him, with his remaining strength he had struggled desperately to crawl away. That he had only just made it was attested by the circumstance of the flames having scorched off that part of the bark bearing the name of the man responsible for his death.

Kyle's jaw corded as he thought of what his brother's last hours must have been.

There was no longer any room for doubt. The fact that Rufe had been knifed in his own camp, coupled with its taking place over a game of Hands, pointed the finger of guilt in one indisputable direction.

Heading north toward the Red River country, Kyle built up a chain of circumstantial evidence which only clinched an already firm conviction. Who had shared this camp with Rufe, having already quarreled with him? Who had played Hands to the point of passion—and even sworn to collect from Rufe what he owed him? Who but Jules Valcour!

Yet when Kyle made camp that night, caching up in a grassy hollow, a new question faced him. What course of action would he adopt on reaching the post? The fact that the man whom he believed had murdered Rufe was the brother of the girl he loved, rose between him and his vengeance. And yet his code demanded that the guilty man be brought to book, even though it meant the end of anything between Delphine and himself.

He sat long over his fire, the bitter thoughts roaring through him. Pictures rose in his mind of Rufe as a little boy, always at his heels; Rufe fighting his own battles, and scorning protection. He swallowed a lump at that last, and rolled up in his blankets against the growing night chill. Hours later a soft snort from one of his pack mules brought him up, broad awake and straining every faculty.

In the soft gray dusk he could just make out the mule through the branches of wild cherry, its long ears pointed forward and snuffling nervously.

"Brown skins! Sure as shootin'!" flashed through his mind like light.

In an instant he was on his feet, rifle in hand. He knew from the mule's actions that it was too late to pack up and steal away. Silently he crept out of camp and, climbing a large rock, flattened himself on its top.

From here he could see not only his camp, but also his four animals in an open glade beyond. For half an hour nothing disturbed the slumbering peace; nothing stirred save the suspicious mule. Ten minutes afterward he descried a creeping shadow approaching the animal's picket-rope. Leveling his rifle, he fired.

A yell rent the night. The dark form thrashed over and went limp, but shrill blood cries rang out from a little distance and the flutter and slash of arrows sounded through the foliage.

"Assiniboines," Maddox muttered, identifying those marrow-freezing cries.

Without further ado he sprang down and began throwing his possibles together. Now was the one chance he had of getting clear, while the savages, knowing he was on the alert, were as surprised as they had expected him to be. Within a few minutes he was packed and quietly leading his animals away from the spot.

He was about to turn into the open and make a dash for it when a savage yell broke out dead ahead. Wheeling to the right, he jammed the cayuse through the trees. Suddenly he saw half a dozen mounted figures rushing down on him. Twanging arrows hummed past his head.

"Owgh—owgh—owgh-gh-h!" the maddened challenges knifed into his consciousness.

For a second he thought he was gone beaver—that he would never reach the North West Company's post to face the murderer of his brother, the wilderness closing over one more unsolved mystery of disappearance. But there was no hesi-

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tation in him as he spurred straight at the enemy.

They swooped down on him like storm-tossed leaves. One brown hand lunged violently at his bridle. Another menaced him with upraised knife. Kyle shot one in the chest and with his clubbed gun cracked the head of the other warrior at his rein.

The remaining braves plunged at his pack animals. They had one free and were hazing it off when Maddox whirled with an aroused yell only to see still more of the savages boiling through the trees, making the night hideous with their screeching.

The other mules were still fastened to his cayuse. Wheeling his pony, he thrashed down the creek bottom at top speed. Once in the open, he threw his animals and barricaded himself. For the rest of the night he held the redskins off with his rifle.

III

A LONG BLUFF

NOT until the sky paled and gray morning dawned was he out of danger. With savage cries of rage and disappointment the Indians drew off. The night had cost him a third of his peltries, but years of the quick touch-and-go of the life of the trapper had prepared him for such eventualities, and when late that afternoon he looked across the prairie and saw Fort Assiniboine, it was thought of what lay ahead of him there and not of his brush with the Indians that turned his face as gray and somber as the storm clouds piling up in the summer sky.

The trappers were already flocking in to rendezvous. Groups of voyageurs moved in and out of the stockade gate, and he had little doubt that Jules Valcour awaited him there—and Laughing Sam Clymer, pressing his attentions on Delphine, affable and persistent as ever.

Two hours later he crossed the Red to pass at once within the walls of the post, where he entrusted his peltries to the care of Old Bat until they should be bartered for necessities or credit. That disposed of—with greetings fired at him in *patois* by friends from every direction—he turned his mind to matters which claimed his chiefest concern.

To his surprise he learned that Jules Valcour had not yet put in his appearance, not a soul having laid eyes on him since he had started out with the spring break-up. Nor—single bright gleam in a dark and ominous prospect—had Sam Clymer returned from his summer's trapping.

He saw nothing of Delphine that evening, for she sat at the bedside of a cousin, a *Vide Poché* trapper brought in the day before with his ribs crushed in by a deadfall. Though not holding himself aloof from the gaiety of annual reunion, the reckless drinking and betting, Kyle found plenty of time to think. It satisfied him that Delphine did not appear. He felt that he couldn't face her until he had had it out with Jules.

What had happened to young Valcour? If he had left the Brulé two weeks ago, he ought to have been in by now. Had he gone under after leaving there? Maddox didn't think so, the suspicion immediately arising that prudence had dictated the other's striking for another rendezvous, perhaps even as far east as York Factory or Churchill, in the Hudson Bay country.

It only confirmed his belief that Jules was Rufe's murderer; and now that he was so near Delphine, his growing certainty that he would track the guilty man to hell if need be, and demand an accounting, left him wretched.

Accordingly, he scarcely knew what to make of it when, the next morning, while busy with his trading, a hullabaloo in the yard announced the arrival of more trappers; and amongst those swaggering in with the marks of a hard spring season on them, he spied Jules.

Black and violent hate rose to swell Kyle Maddox's throat. Choking it down

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somehow, he moved out of the trade-room and stopped a little apart, his moccasined feet widespread, to watch that noisy band of men troop past. Young Valcour, a heavy beaver pack on his back, threw a glance sidewise which struck the dour man who followed him with burning eyes.

Unaccountably, Jules' face brightened. He stopped, tossing out a light-hearted call. "How, Kyle! Rufe come in yet?"

If it was guile, it was of the most consummate sort. Kyle stared, his lips frozen. But Jules did not pass on. After a moment's hesitation, he came closer.

"What's the matter—why do you look at me that way, Maddox? Where is Rufe?"

"He's lying in the rain on the Brulé, his bones picked clean—where you left him!" Kyle ground out. His fingers curled round the haft of his skinning knife.

JULES fell back in amazement, his pack thudding to the ground. For a minute he only gasped. "Rufe—gone under?" he got out then. "It can't be! Why, I left him—" He broke off, breathing, *"Sacré nom!"*

Kyle's iron restraint threatened to give way like a bursting dam. His grievance against this man for the moment blotted

out all else. Thick blood throbbed in his temples.

"You've got gall!" he said thinly; "coming back here after taking a shot at me and then slipping steel between Rufe's ribs! But don't think you can walk wide and play innocent. Show your guts!"

A curious change stole over Jules' lean, dark face. He made no move to defend himself. His voice grated, "When did I ever take a shot at you?"

Kyle never knew why he didn't leap then. But some quality of bewilderment in the other's manner held him back.

"On the Little Buffalo, in March, if you need to be told!"

Jules' features registered consternation. *"Mon Dieu,* was that you? I swear by St. Jean I never knew! Kyle, I'd been driven off my trap-line by a war-party—tailed for two days! I had no idea where you were. I believed I'd shaken the braves off, and was heading back for Brulé Creek; and when I saw you, so close, I went mad for a moment—"

Kyle's lips twisted. "You were in such a sweat that you didn't wait to smash my traps that night either, I suppose? You kept right on, to take your damned mad out on Rufe!"

Valcour went blank. "Traps?" he echoed. "Rufe?" And then, slowly, "You're pretty sure of what happened, *non?*"

A part of Kyle's brain accepted the belief that Jules had had nothing to do with smashing his traps. That was a common Indian trick, and may have, probably had been, done by Assiniboines. But he was not inclined to absolve Jules for such a reason.

"Sure I am! You were playing Hands, and Rufe caught you cheating—"

Jules started to protest violently, then caught himself. "When did this—take place?" he demanded cagely.

"Two weeks ago."

A look of relief washed over the *Wah-keitcha's* features. "Then I could have had nothing to do with it. I was many miles from there—I can prove this," he added, with an earnestness which gave Kyle pause.

"Then prove it—and be damned quick about it!"

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"Well, I will! Just as soon as Etienne Chabonard arrives. Kyle, you're makin' a mistake," he went on hurriedly. "Rufe and I didn't hit it off. I haven't seen him since April. I quit him and went up the Moose Jaw with Etienne—"

"Where is Chabonard?" Kyle rapped out suspiciously.

"I left him yesterday, with the Crees, dickerin' for a squaw; he'll be in before night—there he is now!" he exclaimed, as a hairy, shrewd-eyed French Canadian entered the stockade, ragged, bronzed, alert. Jules called him over.

"Etienne, where have I been this season?" he demanded, before Kyle could speak.

"Weeth me, *mon ami,"* the trapper responded readily. "Up de Moose Jaw, where we rob thees *diables* of Gros Ventres, ha, ha!" Laughing, he took in Kyle's wooden face with a keen glance.

"Since when, Etienne?" Jules prodded.

"Since—" Chabonard scratched his head; "since April, when I find you weeth thees man's brothaire on de Brulé."

Jules' face cleared as he turned to Kyle. "You see?" He shrugged. "I know nothing about it, I tell you."

KYLE had to admit that the stories of Valcour's whereabouts tallied, but he was not satisfied. He put his own questions, striving to break down the evidence of Jules' new partner, only to learn that, if alibi it was, it was too well rehearsed to admit of a loophole.

"I know what you are thinking," Jules broke in abruptly, as if to corner his accuser conclusively. "When Alex Selkirk comes in, ask him where he saw us last. It was on the Moose Jaw—last month!"

Kyle nodded shortly, and Chabonard, hailed by friends, went on; but Jules stayed.

"You still believe I had something to do with Rufe's killing, don't you?" he asked, curiously stubborn.

"Yes."

Jules fired up resentfully. "Get it out of your head!" he cried. "I told you where I was. But your mind is made up, because you've got it in for me anyway. You might as well accuse Sam Clymer of rubbin' Rufe out!" he concluded scornfully.

Kyle's pupils flickered. "Laughing Sam? Has he pulled in?"

"Got in this morning. I saw him down at the landing. He's already traded his pelts with Nick Hawley, the free-trader, and he hasn't a thing on his mind—if you want to talk to him."

Kyle's lean cheeks tightened; he stepped close, his cold eyes gimleting the other. "Don't tell me what to do! Somebody knifed Rufe to shut his mouth; and when I'm sure of the skunk—"

He broke off at the sound of a musical call from the post, his glance sweeping around. Delphine Valcour, having identified her brother from a window, was coming lightly and swiftly to greet him.

"—I'll give him six inches of steel, no matter who he is!" Kyle completed in a low, ominous tone, just as Jules turned, with a sardonic twist of the mouth at the unmistakable warning, to meet the laughing girl.

"Mon Dieu, but you are tall and brown, my Jules!" Delphine exclaimed, saluting him with her fresh young lips. After she had lavished attention on him, she turned to Kyle.

"Kyle!" she beamed. "I see you've kept your hair, *mon ami!"*

She offered him her hand and his big paw closed over it as he jerked off his squirrel-skin cap. He glowed in spite of himself.

It was good to drink in her shining eyes once more and feel the warmth of her presence. He stammered out something.

"Pere Baptiste tell me you are back—that you bring many beaver." And then, "Where's Rufe?" she pursued, still smiling. That smile faded at the look which

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crossed the faces of the men. "But *non!*" she cried. "What is it? What has happened to Rufe?"

"Gone under," Kyle muttered, painfully conscious of Jules, standing there with the quiet of a listening wild thing.

Pity sprang into Delphine's eyes. For a moment her hand rested on his arm.

"I'm sorry, Kyle," she murmured. Tears welled into her eyes. "He was so young; so fond of you, Jules—"

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Kyle Maddox straightened, his muscles snapping taut. Believing what he did, it was all he could do to control himself; and yet to take his revenge with this girl standing between, was asking almost more of himself than flesh and blood could stand.

With his wine-like pleasure in Delphine like salt in an open wound now, he turned away. Thirty minutes later, on his way down to the landing, he came face to face with Sam Clymer.

Neither gave ground. Standing there, they stared with narrowed eyes, each feeling the strong hatred he held for the other. Clymer was the first to speak.

"Maddox, I hear you've got your knife out for young Jules. I warn you right here and now, I'm taking the fight off his hands. This place ain't big enough to hold both of us anyway. Get your traps together and pull out." The words fell flat and final. "I'm givin' you till tomorrow morning."

"You're right!" Kyle made answer grimly, without the movement of a muscle. "One of us'll have to go—and it won't be me, Clymer!"

Laughing Sam's lip curled. "You'll go," he grated; "or you'll go under!"

IV

THE GREEN-EYED DEVIL

THAT evening, in the trade room at Fort Assiniboine, a varied gathering of trappers, men with the bark on, their work behind them, applied themselves to the serious business of life—which meant warming rain-chilled bones with whisky, shouting out batteau-songs and recklessly gambling away their hard-earned fortunes.

Laughing Sam Clymer was there, roaring out witticisms and downing raw spirits. Around him at the rough tables a few ragged packs of cards were being thumbed, but he clung to the quicker game of Hands, a favorite with him, and at which he appeared unbeatable, his hands flashing faster than the eye could follow. Steadily the beaver pelts which passed for money flowed into his possession.

Under the gaiety a tension ran from man to man as a direct result of Clymer's threat to turn Kyle Maddox out of Assiniboine. Waiting glances went from him to where his bitter enemy sat alone at a table near the window, a mug of rum before him.

This air of dire expectancy was lost on Maddox. He was waiting for Jules, prepared to force a showdown before them all. He would square Rufe's murder, and then deal with Clymer.

"I hear Sam made a clean-up somewhere over west this season," he heard a bearded Scot tell his partner. "Like to busted the gunnels o' his canoe, packin' in. Waugh!"

They discussed Laughing Sam's good fortune for a moment. Finally one of them called out, "Hey, Sam! Waur did ye lay traps this spring, old hoss?"

Clymer glanced up. Most of the men in the room were waiting for his answer.

"I roosted on Little Otter," he said, rubbing his palms together, the cherry stone between them, as though that experience had been amazing.

Old Athabasca, an elk-clad trapper of impressive mien, banged a buffalo horn down on the table at which he sat. "Ye're a damned liar!" he averred coolly. "I

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was on Leetle Otter myself; and ye warn't in miles o' thar."

A hush fell. Kyle raised his head sharply. An insult had been passed here that no man worth his salt could overlook. But Laughing Sam—true to his name—smiled casually at Athabasca, nothing feazed. "On the South Fork, wasn't you?" he queried.

"Shore—on Leetle Otter!"

Clymer nodded. "This nigger was on the north branch — amongst them red hills. They call both forks Little Otter."

Athabasca gave him a heated argument, but Sam laughed it off. "Call it God's Pocket or Hell's Delight, that's where I was," he insisted.

Kyle tested his words, his attention arrested. Why had Clymer lied about his whereabouts? Suddenly, into Maddox's mind flashed facts which he had well-nigh forgotten. Laughing Sam had wanted to know where his beaver stream was located. When he refused to say, Clymer had retorted, "Maybe you'd rather have me ask Rufe. I'll get it out of the boy!"

Had Sam Clymer killed Rufe? Kyle shook his head.

"No, it was Jules," he told himself doggedly. "It's plain enough!"

Finding the confirmation he needed in the young Frenchman's continued absence, he fell to weighing his chances after he had settled with the other. Old Bat was the supreme power here; he and Clymer's crowd would line up against him, right or wrong. But he was not without friends hereabouts.

Jules' delayed appearance began to worry him. Had Valcour seized his chance and fled to the lake country? He was considering this with growing alarm, when the opening of a rear door brought him around, his flat muscles tightening. Someone stepped into the trade-room. But it was not Jules; it was Delphine.

She was greeted with a shout of enthusiasm by the trappers. Standing there, she gave them a sweeping smile; then, followed by admiring glances from dark and sparkling eyes, she turned to speak to her father, behind the scarred trade table which served as a bar.

Watching her closely, Kyle wondered if Jules had told her anything. But he could gather nothing from her expression. Sending a quick glance toward the outer door, he hoped she would go; but he told himself it didn't make any difference now. This thing had to be settled, and her presence could not stay him.

His eyes still on Delphine, he did not see the glinting blade which slashed the oiled-paper window against which his shadow was thrown by the bear's-grease lamp, nor did he note the muzzle of the brass-bound pistol, relic of the Old French war, thrust through the aperture and leveled at himself; but he caught the flash of horror which suddenly crossed the girl's face and heard her warning scream.

Hard on the heels of this came the double crash of shots, sounding almost as one. A slug burned across Kyle's scalp which stunned him for the moment.

Every man in the room sprang to his feet, keen glances knifing the doors and windows.

"Wolf doin's! Waugh!" yelled a grizzled trapper, and started a rush for the open. Kyle was not far behind the crowd surging into the yard.

Outside the window through which the would-be assassin had fired, they were jerked up by the sight of Jules Valcour, standing over the prone form of a man, a smoking weapon in his hand.

"It's Jock Duncan!" a man yelled. "Deader'n a gut-shot Injun!"

Sam Clymer thrust to the fore. For a second he stared down at the body of his partner; then his smoking eyes snapped up. "What's the meanin' of this, Valcour?"

Jules faced him coolly. "I was over across the river. On my way back, I

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saw Duncan shove his gun in the window. I spotted Maddox through the hole he'd made. There wasn't time to call a warning; it looked like Kyle was a dead beaver. So I let Duncan have it—just in time, it looks like," he added, his glance going to Kyle, staunching his wound near at hand.

"That don't shine!" Clymer blustered truculently, his cheeks darkening. "Jock never had anything against Maddox!"

"Nothing but the fact that he was the partner of a white-livered skunk named Laughing Sam Clymer!" Kyle threw in bluntly.

WITH a snarl of rage, Sam went for his knife. Before he could get it out, Bat Valcour shoved his scatter-gun almost in his face.

"Non, non!" he rasped. There was no mistaking his sincerity as he added, "Clymer, you start thees cuttin', I feex you so you can't even be stuff'!"

Fuming, Clymer did not allow his fury to be averted from Kyle. His heavy jaw thrust out.

"You've had your orders from me, Maddox!" he bellowed. "I'll keep this on the fire with the rest of what I've got cookin' for you!"

To his surprise, Delphine pushed up beside her father to confront him.

"Mother of God, why should Kyle go?" she demanded. "I don't want him to leave!"

Thunderstruck by her unexpected championing of himself, Kyle could only stare at her.

But Old Athabasca found a word to say. "I reckon Sam figgers he can't beat Kyle's time no other way, Delphine."

Clymer whirled on him. "You keep out of this, Athabasca!"

A ferocious smile curved the trapper's iron lips. Defiance was only invitation to him. "Listen hyar, Clymer! If you and Maddox come together head on, old buffler bull, that shines with me. But when it comes to sendin' a man out to bushwhack another through winders, that's somethin' else ag'in—an' you kin smoke that!"

There were murmurs of approval from several directions. Weighing his chances and not finding them to his liking, Clymer turned sullenly away.

The trappers began to drift back into the trade-room. Maddox saw something in Delphine's eyes, as she clung to his side, that had never been there before.

"Kyle—your head?" she asked impulsively. *"Mon Dieu,* how it must hurt—"

"I'm all right," he told her. "It could have been a lot worse."

She would have stayed, but Old Bat would not hear of it. "Back you go to your room!" he ruled sternly. "By Gar, you mak' trouble enough wit' you pretty face! *Allez!"* And he fetched her an admonishing slap in the skirts that brought a roar from the crowd.

V

HANDS AND HEARTS

FIFTEEN minutes later, the incident seemed to have been forgotten. With something of his good humor restored, Laughing Sam Clymer was holding forth at Hands again. A fiddle squeaked and jugs gurgled their fiery contents into horn drinking cups. But deep in the eyes of every man there was a wary expectancy.

Across the table where he sat with Jules Valcour, Kyle studied the other calculatingly, a furrow knitting his brows.

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At last he said, "Valcour, you killed Rufe! Yet you saved my life. I can't understand it."

"Are you still so sure I killed him?" Jules demanded.

"We both know what happened on the way to the Dakotah country, last March," Kyle answered. Grimly explicit, he explained about the piece of birch-bark. "Rufe wrote that he was playing Hands with someone when he was knifed. It didn't say who; the name was burned off. But—"

Jules shook his head.

"Maddox, I didn't kill Rufe. But I know who did. Sam Clymer is your man."

Kyle's eyes widened. Secretly he saw in the charge a deliberate attempt to play upon his open rivalry with Clymer for Delphine. But thought of what Jules had done gave him pause.

"Are you saying that because Clymer plays Hands?" he asked thinly; "or can you back up your words."

"But *oui!* Would I speak if I couldn't? Always Clymer trade with my fathaire. This year he go over to Nick Hawley, the American renegade; and I ask myself why. Pa-pa-mos, the Cree who worked for Bat, is helping Hawley this season. He got me a pelt from one of Sam Clymer's packs. He says that skin could have come from only one place—"

"Where's that?"

"From the Brulé!" Surreptitiously, Jules drew a beaver skin from under the table.

Maddox stared at it. Running his fingers through the hair, against the grain, he recognized the truth of what Jules said. The darkness of the under-coat told him plainly enough that the pelt had come from the waters of the Brulé.

"If Clymer had nothing to do with Rufe's killing, let him explain how this pelt came into his possession," Jules persisted. "He sold it—Pa-pa-mos will back me up!"

Kyle's gaze narrowed. "Valcour, I asked you once why you hate Clymer, though Delphine thinks you are great friends. I think you'll tell me now."

Jules flushed darkly. His eyes dropped. "Sam won money from me at Hands," he confessed in an angry mutter. "He's holding it over my head with *mon pere* —forcing me to push his favor with Delphine!"

Under his wind-tanned impassiveness the blood drained away from Kyle's lean cheeks. Not only did Jules' earnestness impress him, but the facts spoke for themselves. He understood now why Clymer was so anxious to takes Jules' fight off his hands. And yet a doubt remained in his mind as his eyes lifted across the room to Clymer.

"Sam hates me," he muttered. "He'd do anything to get rid of me."

"He'd do anything to get rid of anyone who stood in his way. He's a dirty, rotten crook! Look at the way he's pilin' up the pelts tonight!"

Kyle waited no longer. "I'll settle this, once for all," he snapped, as he flung himself to his feet.

With Jules at his elbow, he approached the table at which Sam Clymer plied the elusive cherry stone. Half-a-dozen trappers and voyageurs stood around. One of them had just been cleaned out. He turned away with a curse. Clymer looked up.

"Who's next?" he queried, rubbing his hands before him invitingly.

To the surprise of all, Kyle spoke up.

"I'm your coon."

Laughing Sam's eyes sharpened. For a moment it was hard to tell how he would take it. Then with unconcealed hostility, he gave a contemptuous shrug.

"I reckon your beaver's worth as much a plew as another's. What's the stake—ten prime pelts?"

"Ten—or a hundred, it's all one," said Kyle ominously. "Turn your wolf loose!"

Suddenly Sam grinned. Showing the

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polished cherry pit in one hand, he scrubbed it briskly between his palms. Kyle's glance was hawklike. The brown hands blurred, and a second later the two fists, separated, were presented on the table-top for his choice.

He indicated the left. Clymer opened it. It was empty.

Kyle nodded. "Ten more," he clipped tersely in the charged silence. Every man in the room had his eyes on them now.

Laughing Sam went through his passes again, and again Kyle picked the left hand, to find it empty. Without lifting his eyes, he barked, "Show me the stone in the other hand!"

Blandly Clymer opened his right hand to reveal the worn pit in his palm.

"Ten more!"

THERE was a taut crackle in Kyle's tone. This time his eyes were glued to one hand. Sam flashed through his act and thrust his fists forward on the table, a foot apart. Kyle hesitated. Had he seen aright? Slowly he said, "It's in your right hand, Clymer!"

Instead of moving that one, Sam turned over the left. In it lay the tantalizing pit which said that Kyle had lost.

A growl started deep in the latter's chest. His arm jerked back with a swiftness that matched Laughing Sam's, and the flickering grease-lamps gleamed wickedly on the arcing blade as he drove his skinning knife squarely through Clymer's supposedly empty right hand, the force of the blow driving the knife-point two inches deep in the plank table. From the bloody fingers pinned helplessly to the board, where all might see, there rolled out a second cherry stone—proof indisputable of his cheating!

The roar that burst from a dozen outraged throats at his discovered cheating drowned the scream that was torn from Clymer's throat. Only too well he knew himself cornered like a rat in a trap. In another moment these trappers, fierce with indignation, would tear him to shreds. His good hand darting to his belt, he made a desperate lunge with his knife.

The blade grazed Kyle's collar-bone. Before he could strike again the knife fell to the floor, its clatter lost in the thunderclap from the cap-and-ball pistol which Jules Valcour thrust forward and fired almost in Clymer's face.

Laughing Sam slumped lifeless across the boards, his guilty hand still pinned where it was. For Kyle the evidence was complete, and his eyes met Jules' in silent approval.

The climax had caught Old Bat napping. He grabbed his two-shot gun now and started around the counter with an angry bellow; but before he could take command of the situation, Delphine flashed past him and flung herself between Jules and Kyle.

"What is it?" she cried excitedly. "What was that shot?" Her eyes went to the weapon in her brother's hand. Then she saw the crumpled figure on the floor. "Jules—you have shot Sam!" she gasped.

The trappers and *coureurs de bois,* harshly applauding the swift retribution meted out to Clymer, had fallen silent on her arrival. Even Old Bat lowered his scatter-gun and held his tongue.

Words spilled from Jules' lips. "Delphine, Kyle caught Sam cheating! He went for his knife—I had to let him have it!"

"Non!" Delphine cut him off, the fire of her coming through her cold steadiness. "I will have no excuses! You have murder this man, between you, planning like *carcajou—"*

"Delphine," Kyle broke in desperately; "Jules is telling the truth! You've got to listen—"

She turned on him fiercely. "What have you to say? You—who a few minutes ago accused this man of sending his partner against you!"

"Delphine — you don't understand!"

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Jules broke in on her. "It was Sam who cheated Rufe Maddox; then knifed him and left him to the wolves!"

Delphine fell back, her lips bloodless. "What is this? Rufe murdered—" she cried.

WHILE the trappers listened, as astounded as she by this revelation, Jules explained about the beaver packs which Clymer had stolen from Rufe.

Kyle added to the story, and Jules began to turn out Clymer's pockets. Flint and steel, bone fish-hooks, a dozen worn cherry stones, came to light. And then with a grunt of surprise he held up a gold doubloon, a hole pierced through it.

"See!" he cried. "Rufe's luck piece!"

Glancing at it, a shock ran through Kyle as he recognized the charm.

"That settles it!" he grated. "This was in Rufe's pocket when he left here last spring. I'd know it anywhere!"

Delphine was at his side, looking into his hand. "Are you—sure, Kyle?" she faltered.

"Positively!" he said firmly.

Getting up from his knees, Jules met Kyle Maddox's steady look, a new understanding between them. Delphine caught that look, and her eyes filled with tears. She placed a hand on Kyle's arm.

"Take me away," she murmured chokingly. "Take me out under the stars, Kyle, where I can forget all this."

Old Bat would have protested, but Athabasca pushed him back. The trappers stepped aside and made a way for them.

With the gallantry of a *grand seigneur* of the Canadas, Kyle offered Delphine his arm.

"Come," he said.

She raised her eyes to his, and he read in them a promise that transcended his hopes.

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PAPPY DUNPHY'S SOUP

By PERRY ADAMS
Author of "Officer Material," "Hick Dick," etc.

LES HANDLEY'S ear phones clicked and the voice of his leader said:

"There — under us — you chaps see? Smack in the open, the balmy old idiot. Certainly didn't think he'd be so dumb—the Mullah, of all people! Why, he's even got the stuff stacked by colors. Big red patch is the bunch of boxes with regular H.E. in 'em. And there's Pappy Dunphy's soup—that small, bright yellow patch. Imagine spotting the stuff so easily! Well, our orders were, 'Locate and report'. We've done the locating, so it's home, James. Race you fellas back to Risalpur. Last man at the breakfast table buys the beer for tiffin. Break formation."

The two planes were flying low—at about seven-fifty. In a wide arc Captain Tommy Bates, the leader, swung his ship away from the other and headed east. They were over the yellow-gray tangle of the Tribal Interzone, where an early summer sun etched black shadows under the western shoulders of countless flinty, sardine-like ridges. The Mad Mullah of Ipi had pitched his camp in a barren valley without so much as a capful of cover —probably defiantly—and in their massed bright boxes, the stolen explosives were as unmistakable against that drab background as fresh paint daubs on a palette.

Les Handley made to follow his boss, but when he started into his bank, the motor of the larger ship coughed, sputtered. He lost flying speed, side-slipped a couple of hundred feet on his right

Pappy's Soup Was a Very Special Brand of High Explosive—and It Was Kidnaped into Afghan Territory

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wing, then managed to level off again, nose northwest. Home was due east.

Though distinctly sour, the motor picked up for a few seconds; Les could hear Tommy Bates making his report to Headquarters. Then through the still open switch the voice of his superior broke off—spoke directly to him.

"Why don't you follow? What's up?"

"She seems very wonky," Les answered.

The motor was getting worse. Travis Mann, Les Handley's observer and co-pilot, turned around quickly, his goggle-shielded face one big question. The gesture came as near speech as anything that had passed between them for several months. Without an answering sign, Les Handley stared coldly at the other. What the ship's trouble was, Les couldn't determine; she was certainly getting fuel and the oil gauge showed pressure.

The motor choked, "Huh. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha," in a querulous, uncertain tone, metal ground ominously on metal, then somewhere something flew entirely loose and took up a great slapping and banging like some kid rattling a stick along a picket fence. Then, as if some invisible hand had squeezed away its flickering life, the motor conked out completely.

Suddenly it was dead still and for just a breath the ship hung in the coppery blue vault of the Indian morning; still, save for a small, distant saw-mill that was Tommy Bates returning to investigate.

The ship thrust her blunt nose groundward, and as the struts burst into screaming song, the crazyquilt Zakka Khel country sped up to meet them.

BAIL out? There wasn't the altitude. Les caught Travis Mann making a quick gesture to unbuckle — saw him shake his head, sink back. Staring at the other's helmet, Les had just time to think:

"God knows I didn't wish this on us, but if we get down alive and conscious, I think what I said about you will be proved to the hilt. You're yellow, baby!"

If they got down alive and conscious. No place to land in that mess. Never was, up here. Standing orders read: "Should a pilot survive a forced landing in the Interzone and be physically capable, he will (1) Set fire to his ship; (2) Shoot himself to avoid torture at tribal hands." Such was a flier's lot on India's Northwest Frontier. Of course, a dead stick landing was a thing you figured happened to the other chap, never to yourself.

Like dying; the other fellow did it—in your own mind you lived forever, on the rare occasions when you gave the matter any thought at all.

At perhaps a hundred and fifty feet Les pulled up her nose. She skated along, puddle-jumped the crown of a small, round hill, swerved — headed straight down the selfsame valley where the Mad Mullah of Ipi had his camp.

Les saw turbanned figures suddenly scattering; so many terrified, dirty white bugs scuttling from the menace of a bigger bug.

She scraped along the valley floor. Les pulled her up for all it was worth, and it wasn't worth much. With nearly the last of her forward surge she skidded out over a slight dip and pancaked, washing out the undercarriage like so much brittle straw.

But still she had a bit more grinding and flopping along in her system. At the very edge of the Mullah's brown tents she gave a sort of last, high-noted squeal, flipped up on her nose—crunching the already broken prop—and, about to turn turtle, decided against it and settled down right side up.

The shaken pair in her hadn't a scratch.

Through the dust they saw the Mullah's people running toward them.

Les Handley rasped, "Landing flare—

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to your left under cockpit. Grab it and drop out."

Chalk under his tan, Travis Mann nodded. The next instant both men were on the ground. They ran a few paces, stopped.

Les said, "Now—heave!"

Though junior size, the flare was heavy. Travis Mann held its up end and whirled around like a man about to throw the hammer. He let the flare go. The nose crashed squarely into the fuselage. The ship burst into flame.

From both fliers an unconscious, involuntary sigh. A good ship she had been, sweet in the air, easy to land; in a few moments she'd be just a blackened, twisted mass of junk. This was like giving the *coup de grace* to a friend.

THOUGH now very near, the foremost of the Mullah's men paused briefly as the ship was fired.

Les Handley tugged out his big, blue Webley through the slit pocket of his flying clothes. Travis Mann, who should have been doing likewise, seemed to hesitate.

The Afridis were closing in.

"Your gun!" Les cried harshly.

Travis Mann appeared in a daze; it was all of a piece with what Les Handley had expected of him.

"I won't kill myself," Travis muttered. "Orders or no orders. I don't hold with suicide."

Les Handley choked. "Why, you snivelling, yellow—!" This was the clincher, right enough, but there was no time to talk about it. "Look," Les resumed breathlessly, an eye on the tribesmen, "'mind suicide. Hold guns against each other's heads. Count three. Squeeze triggers. Easy. *Quick you fool!*"

Again Travis shook his head. "Kill a brother officer? No. Against my principles, that, too."

The Mullah's crowd was right on them.

"Principles—hell!" Les cried. Damned fool had had his chance. Let him be taken alive, see how he liked torture, then. "They won't get me though," said Les, half aloud.

He pressed the Webley to his temple. The muzzle felt cold as death. It *was* death. In his mind's eye flashed a picture of a quiet Kentish garden. A bland English sun warmed it like a caress and the air was heavy with the scent of roses. Standing among them he saw a stately, lovely woman. She was smiling at him. He thought, "Poor mother, this'll cut her up no end"—even as his hand flexed for the fatal squeeze.

And then he was knocked head over heels. Before he stopped rolling, a rifle butt smashed the revolver from his hand. His wrist went numb.

Travis Mann, too, had been swarmed under.

Les grated at him, "Damn you, Mann—you—you—" He bit it off, fell silent.

They were in for it now—for the kind of death most dreaded by those who serve the Raj in that distant outpost of Empire. And the Mullah was a fanatic noted for his fiendish cruelty to prisoners.

ALL because, thought Les, Travis Mann was a misfit—a chap who should never have been given a commission. His kind should be wearing a high collar in some bank, sitting there safely behind a grille; he just didn't belong in the Service—least of all in the Flying Corps.

When the hands of both had been bound, they were jerked to their feet. Contrary to dime novel lore, if you have a prisoner in the open it is almost a waste of time to bind his feet if his hands are secured. Should he try to escape without the use of his arms, the most leaden-footed captor could easily overtake him.

With no hair showing beneath the line

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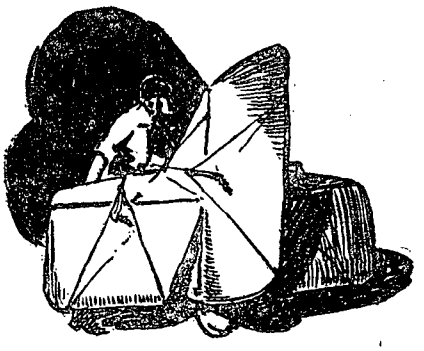
of his helmet, Travis Mann's long serious young face might have belonged to a Trappist monk; there was a quality about his wide set brown eyes that reflected a habit of somber introspection. The nose was long and straight, cheekbones high, austere, while the narrow slit of a mouth reflected little humor. But the chin was strong and honest—a good, a mighty good chin; no denying it.

Oddly enough, and contrary to the dictum that a cleric's male offspring shall be harum-scarum, the monklike Travis *was* the son of a Yorkshire clergyman. Like so many of his cloth, Travis' father was very poor. Not so Travis' uncle, his father's elder brother. Rich Uncle Ben had been a dashing lancer, who won the coveted V.C. at Omdurman, during the Sudanese trouble of 1898. Uncle Ben offered to pay for his nephew's education, provided the boy went into the army. The father had hoped serious-minded Travis would follow him into the church. But the offer was tempting to a man who might not see more than two hundred and fifty dollars in a twelvemonth. So Travis was trained for a military career. Without particular say in the matter, he had grown up, taking it for granted that he must prepare himself for a life which had never particularly attracted him.



It was chiefly due to his studious aloofness that Travis seemed so much older than Les Handley, though both were twenty-four. Les of the flaming mop of red hair, the unruly, reckless blue eyes and the quick-tempered, generous mouth seemed, somehow, a mere kid by comparison. Les even had a kid's freckles scattered all over his eager face. In many ways he was still adolescent, still very much one to whom this world was an unopened oyster. He gave indications of becoming a grand flier—if and when he ceased taking silly, little boy chances.

Les Handley, in short, reminded you of another generation of pilots—those who flew in France during the World War, foolishly brave, careless of discipline, living wholly in the moment.

As was characteristic of that old-time flying crew, Les, too, liked wild parties. Twice he had been grounded for tipsy, early morning appearances on the flying field. He had been told his commission would not survive a third offense.

HE AND Travis had arrived at the northern flying base within a month of each other. With little in common, for over a year they had infrequent contact outside of duty. The first bad blood between them came just after Les' first grounding. Without particular tact and in a manner which seemed faintly patronizing and holier-than-thou, Travis presumed to take Les to task for his excessive drinking.

Still raw from a tongue lashing by the C.O., Les made a pointed reply. One word led to another.

Finally Travis said, "You drink because you have an inferiority complex. You're afraid of something, afraid to face it. That's the case with all weak fools who dull their wits with liquor." Travis neither drank nor smoked.

Les' flaming hair stood up like an enraged terrier's.

"Why, you poor book worm," he exploded, "what the hell do you know about life—living? Nothing! And you have the superlative, unmitigated gall to stand there and lecture *me*. Come outside, and

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I'll damned well knock your smug block off!"

Travis shrugged. "I don't believe in fist fights. Not only do they prove nothing, they're degrading. They—"

"Yah," Les flung at him disgustedly, "I might have known it!"

There was more of the same, and time did not improve matters. Les thought of Travis as a yellow, mealy-mouthed finger-waggler. Travis thought of Les as a weak, silly fool who was deliberately ruining his health.

Again Les was grounded for foolishly coming on dawn patrol parade from an all-night session in the nearby gunners' mess. He was obviously tight. Somehow he got the quite erroneous idea that Travis Mann had drawn the attention of their immediate superior, Tommy Bates, to his condition. Later that morning Les tried to pick a fight with Travis, but as before, without success. What could you do with a bloke who simply smiled and looked pained after a resounding slap in the face?

But Tommy Bates, who had as shrewd a knowledge of men as he had of ships, surprised some of his cronies by remarking that both those cubs of his had the kind of stuff he liked and that at bottom they weren't very different, after all. Bates went out of his way to bring the pair together. The moment the latest ban on Les' flying was lifted, the well-meaning captain commenced sending them aloft in two-seaters. Alternating as pilot and observer, they went through their duties like hostile strangers—as they had done this morning on the little job of locating Pappy Dunphy's stolen soup.

How all that British H.E. had fallen into tribal hands was simple enough. Six miles down a little spur valley which ran out of the Khyber from Fort Maude, was an obsolete fort known as Susie. In days bygone, long before the British made the Khyber the highway it is today, with a broad gauge railway all the way from Jamrud up to Landi Kotal, Fort Susan had been a highly important outpost to the larger Fort Maude. Now that communications were so improved and troops could be shifted by rail in a jiffy, Susie had been abandoned.

But in so leaving the crumbling pile, the Raj provided a strong rallying point for tribal malcontents. The Mad Mullah of Ipi had been the latest of these to wave green banners from Susie's sagging turrets. Swatis, Orakzais and hotheads from various Afridi *khels* were foregathered there in considerable force—enough to provide a menace to nearby Peshawar, spearhead of the whole Northwest Frontier Province.

Rather late in the day, the General Staff decided that if poor old Susie were removed, the menace would vanish with her. For this work, as usual, they called in Colonel Dunphy, D.S.O., M.C., of the Royal Engineers—an efficient eccentric known everywhere on the Frontier as "Pappy." Pappy was a character. Like Topsy, he just grew. Even in a uniform which lends the lowliest an air of romantic dash, Pappy succeeded in looking like an elderly garage mechanic. He had the soul of a professor of chemistry, the heart of an extremely absent minded lion, and, although he was an utter anomaly as a leader of troops in the field, as an expert of high explosives he had no superior anywhere. Pappy was a one of a kind specialist who was pretty much a law unto himself.

HIS best known and most often used contribution to the cause of frightfulness was an incredibly deadly concoction always referred to as "Pappy Dunphy's Soup." Nobody save Pappy knew what went into the formula; he claimed he was afraid to make it common knowledge. Pappy was the official blower-upper for the First Peshawar and Fourth Quetta Divisions. Susie had been just Pappy's meat.

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Through that never-failing grapevine which has its roots in a thousand dark crannies of Peshawar Bazaar, the Mullah of Ipi learned of Pappy's latest mission. Craftily the Mullah withdrew from Fort Susan, so that a precautionary reconnaissance from the air revealed the place temporarily empty. And so one company of Mahratta Light Infantry was considered ample for Pappy's escort. His party was the customary handful of highly trained white sappers, dubbed with reason "Pappy's Suicide Club." Along with Mahrattas and English sappers went a mule train with Indian drivers. The H.E. was on the mules.

The Mullah's ambush of Pappy and Company was simple and effective. Under Susie's very walls most of the escort was killed while the mule train was being cut off. Pappy's gray hair was too neatly parted by a spear, but a slight wound like that meant nothing to him. With most of his sappers, somehow he managed to fight his way back to Fort Maude, where, slightly lightheaded, he was put to bed in a tearing temper. How long, he yelled, was the Raj going to permit all that explosive to remain in the hands of as homicidal a maniac as the country had suffered in twenty years?

The simplest out might have been to blow up the whole kit and kaboodle from the air—the Mullah with it. Perfect, had the Mullah been so short-sighted as to bottle himself up in Fort Susie with his loot. But he hadn't, and the British reasoned they had too much money tied up in that H.E. to warrant setting it off in the hills. True, such a step might wipe out the gentleman of Ipi and most of his followers, but it would leave Susie just where she'd always been—and with matronly arms outstretched to the very next lot of tribal trouble makers who happened along. Short of killing both birds with one stone, the Staff decided on the hazardous course of attempting to recover the explosive.

Exactly anticipating the British line of reasoning, the Mullah sat, calmly defiant, in the valley where the Risalpur Dawn Patrol had discovered him.

The advent of the two scout planes had disturbed the Mullah at breakfast, which he now resumed, seemingly indifferent to the prisoners being led before him. His method of satisfying the inner man lacked delicacy. Squatting before a huge, dirt encrusted iron pot, his talon-like fingers scooped up chunks of stewed beef, ravenously pushed through a hennaed beard into a cruel, cavernous mouth.

He had removed his *kullah**—he wore no turban—revealing an eggshaped head close shaven save for a coal black, oily topknot. For one of his appetite his extreme emaciation was surprising. This, and a loose jointed, large boned frame, accentuated his great height—apparent even when he was seated. Hollow cheeks, hooked nose and a predatory squint gave him the look of a dusky vulture.

For several moments he paid no heed to the two Englishmen, halted a few paces away. Then, wiping greasy fingers on stained muslin once presumably white, he belched with noisy gusto and raised his fanatic's eyes.

"Your descent, so unexpected, makes me most happy," he said, in Pushtu through which the venom of his sarcasm ran like gall. "I am unworthy of such high honor, sahibs! But then, the Raj, ever solicitous of poor Moslem holy men, often delights in sending ambassadors at unanticipated moments. No matter; you stood not on ceremony, neither shall I. What fun we shall have—you as my special guests. Oh, I have the reputation of being a rare host, I assure you!"

His heavily armed, bearded henchmen laughed delightedly. They could appreciate his suave bitterness to the full—when it was not directed at themselves.

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* *Kullah:* A pointed straw cap, used chiefly as the base for a turban.

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TRAVIS MANN looked like a lost owl and as for Les Handley, he felt certain that his wrist was broken.

"Yes," went on the Mullah, rising, "at first I had thought to extend the usual hospitality humbly offered my Christian visitors. Perhaps you have heard of it? Hah?

"But as you came bouncing into my arms so delightfully, all at once I had a vision. Allah spoke in no uncertain terms, and I perceived that entertainment suited to the peculiar circumstances must be the order of the day. Something more original than routine torture, O doubly fortunate sahibs. Something—shall we say more subtle?

"For experience proves that, dogs though you be, men of your race too well withstand the most exquisite mortification of the flesh. *Han*—that much I grant you!

"Yet it is an insignificant thing, physical bravery—a thing taken for granted among us Pathans. O, sahibs, I tell you that the true measure of a man is not his stoicism under mere bodily suffering, but his ability to rise above mental anguish.

"In the name of Allah, the Omnipotent, the All-Merciful, never let it be said that I am not a generous man. For I shall provide you with a unique opportunity to test that ability in yourselves. How? Soon you shall learn."

He had raised his voice dramatically, for by now the whole camp had crowded round to see and hear the show. Tightly bound by the wrists, Les Handley's right hand was a dead weight against his left, and the fires of hell were in his forearm, with flames licking fast to the shoulder.

Yes, that wick disarming him had broken bone for certain. Les did not speak Pushtu nearly so well as the studious Travis, yet the thread of the Mullah's monologue was clear enough. To what was he leading?

Casting burning eyes about him, the Mullah resumed.

"Now let all within the sound of my voice weigh the fairness of my proposition. The English—God's curse defile them—had a fort. It they no longer wanted. But when needy, homeless men foregathered there, grateful for the shelter afforded by walls even so decayed as those—what transpired? The white men, snarling dogs ever, must forthwith plan to raze that shelter to the ground. It was valueless to them, yet would they let no one else have it. So be it.

"Then? They sent the man of big explosions, Dunphy Sahib, with many red boxes and some of the famous yellow ones, too. Yet by the grace of God and the Prophet did we foil the plan!"

Deep-throated cries of appreciation filled the air.

The gratified emissary of Allah nodded, made a thoughtful fist, stared at it.

"*Insh'Allah!* Such was the will of God! It was written, my children. Very well. Now, remembering what the white man wished to do, is it not fitting that we should pay him back in kind? By those *Imams* of blessed memory, I think so!

"The white man would have blown us from a fort for which he no longer had use. Let us, in turn, blow *him* from a fort not only useful to him, but also of great military importance in his sight. An eye for an eye. And that, O sahibs smiled on by *Kismet*, brings you into my calculations. Have patience. I shall make myself very clear."

The tight circle of loose robed ruffians strained forward that they might not miss a syllable of the *denouement*. Les Handley felt sick and weak from the pain of his wrist; he had a mortal fear he might faint. If he did, these rascals would think it was because of the Mullah's implications, for they knew nothing of the injured wrist.

"I can't faint—I mustn't," Les told himself. And just as he sensed he was

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about to do that very thing, all pain ceased. The whole arm and shoulder felt numb, lifeless.

THE Mullah was smiling thinly. "Soon the one who flew back to observe what befell these two will have advised his people, and help will be sent. A waste of time! For by a back route unknown to the English we shall circle the rescuers, and by dusk we shall be hidden in a small copse of deodars exactly across the Khyber from Fort Maude. Those heaven-sent trees, so out of place where they are, will screen twenty of my best shots. Myself as well—and you English.

"When darkness comes, all the yellow boxes will be carried across the Pass and placed beneath the walls of the fort. Not the red ones, sahibs—the yellow ones! Are the sahibs aware of the effect of a shot through a yellow box? But of course.

"Very well. Gagged so that you cannot possibly cry out and trussed like the swine that you are, you, too, will be carried there and tied to the yellow boxes. You will be under a section of the wall where the sentry beats do not go, a section which overhangs slightly, so that even in daylight, those above cannot see you. Long have I marked that spot!

"True, men bound even as tightly as will you be, still may roll; and you will not be so securely tied to the yellow boxes that you may not roll a little—if you wish. But if you move the least bit too violently you will dislodge one of the yellow boxes and then—well, you will destroy yourselves and the fort."

He paused, to let his words sink in, narrowly watching his captives. Nettled by the lack of visible response, the Mullah rushed on to his climax.

"And now we approach the delicious mental anguish that is to be yours, *Angrezi*. Yours will be all the hours of darkness to win free—if you can and *if you dare*. That chance I give you. I have spoken of what a shot into one of the boxes would bring about; so through the night you will ever know that if by dawn you remain where we have placed you, my marksmen here in the deodars will quickly conclude the performance."

A bedlam of hoarse shouting. Spears and rifles were brandished in a perfect ecstasy of approval. A new kind of game, this!

The Mullah raised a hand. "Nay, nay," he protested with mock modesty, "in this weary world there is no perfection. Yet possibly my little scheme approaches it." His expression changed. "And now we have no more time to waste!"

THERE was an instant in that day's gruelling, ever careful progression by back *khuds* when Les' hopes of rescue ran high.

The party had worked up a long, steep ravine to within a few paces of the skyline, when from the valley beyond came the faint but unmistakable clatter and jingle of mounted men on the move. Les strained forward. For a second or two —no more—he had a glimpse over the brow of the hill. A squadron or more of Jat lancers, obviously searching, walked their mounts along the valley floor. The lead horses were not more than seventy-five yards distant.

Les made to cry out, to raise his bound wrists. But the best his brick-dry throat could bring forth was a hoarse croak, and the dead weight of his broken right wrist slowed the effort to bring up his

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arms to waving position; slowed it—and the chance was gone, for the heel of a calloused brown hand smashed brutally into his face, knocking him to his knees and bringing the blood spurting from his nose.

Travis Mann, some distance behind and lower, was unaware of the lancers' proximity, as were most of the Mullah's men—until a warning signal from those nearest Les froze all into prone immobility.

The sounds made by the cavalry detachment grew fainter, fainter, were gone. The Mullah's boast that he could evade any attempt at rescue seemed far from idle. But Les' effort to call out had not escaped him; before the party moved on, both prisoners were lightly gagged.

Considerably to the rear of the rest, the twenty cases of Pappy Dunphy's soup were gingerly, even fearfully, carried in slings fashioned from knotted turban muslins. Well did the tribesmen know the deadly ease with which the raging devils within those yellow boxes could be roused!

Thinking back, and reasoning that this extraordinarily volatile explosive must have undergone considerable rough handling when Pappy's detail was ambushed, Les marvelled that the stuff had not been detonated. A freak of chance, obviously.

The day was nearly done when Les spied a section of Khyber Pass, far below; he could see nothing of the Fort Maude heights, yet the general location told him the British stronghold could not be far off.

Ever forced on at spearpoint, the two officers at last were permitted to sit down. Their gags were removed. Hands still bound before them, they were given bits of *chuppattis*, washed down by brackish, brown water from a filthy goatskin *mussik*.

The bearers of the yellow boxes lowered them to the ground with infinite caution before coming up to join the rest. No fires were made. Presently, led by the Mullah, all the Moslems drew away from the Englishmen to join in evening prayer. For saint or sinner, rich or poor, no true follower of Islam dreams of going through a day without paying homage to Allah the prescribed number of times.

IT WAS while the others were so engaged that Les and Travis had their first real opportunity for speech since the accident. In that quiet spot, close wrapped in the everlasting hills and with the peace of evening on them like a benediction, it came to Les that Travis Mann was not yellow from choice; no man was. Then, thinking of the ordeal ahead, suddenly Les knew that all their differences had been petty and trivial. Into his generous heart came an overwhelming impulse to tell Travis how he felt. This might well be the last, the only chance to do so.

He looked at the dark Yorkshireman, then, looked him full in the face for the first time in many months.

"How're you sticking it, Travis?"

In the commonplace question was an unmistakable overtone of friendliness. Travis Mann caught it, gulped a bit.

"Well enough, thanks. I was a damned fool this morning, Les. I—I want you to know I know it. But you can't realize how strongly, all my life, I've been schooled against the fundamental cowardice of suicide. When I came up on the Frontier and read standing orders, I—well, all I could do was hope I'd never have to face that situation. As to shooting you in cold blood, I just—couldn't. Better if I had."

"Probably," Les agreed soberly. He managed a smile. "But we've been spared the usual disgusting mutilation, and—whatever happens tonight it seems to me the best way to face it is to keep remembering that there *is* a chance of coming through, however small. If we don't

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make it—well, at least we won't be dying by inches. Either we'll accidentally jar one of the boxes in the night or at daylight a bullet will do the trick. Whichever happens, it's a good, clean way to go west, if you ask me!"

"I'm not afraid of death," Travis murmured, "even though you think I'm a coward. I—I know I haven't been very popular in the mess. If we have to go this way, my chief regret is there won't be any chance to prove I'm the sort I want to believe I am. You see—"

"Oh, hell," Les broke in almost roughly. "Forget it, Travis. Forget it." He was deeply moved. "When the time comes, you'll go out like a man. That's enough! That's our tradition, you know, our birthright as Englishmen."

"Englishmen—England!" Travis' eyes were bright with unshed tears. In a low voice, not quite steady, he quoted from Rupert Brooke's imperishable sonnet:

> "'If I should die, think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field,
> That is forever England.'"

Silently, Les was thinking of his young mother, as he had been most of that long day. Could one fabulous wish be granted him, it would be that he might be beside her a moment—long enough, just long enough to say good-by.

But, after their final salaams to the east the tribesmen were returning, and the high moment ended.

"We should've tried to get away while they were at prayer!" Travis whispered fiercely.

Les shook his head. "In this heavy flying gear, with our hands tied? No, Travis. It'd be just a waste of time. The idea came to me, too, for a second. No——"

LONG arms invisible in voluminous sleeves, the Mullah of Ipi was looking down at them quizzically.

"This chance for talk I gave you," he said, "for in a little while you will be gagged again—for good. Those gags will not be the makeshift affairs of today. They will be *pukkah*, I assure you. And so well applied, that if you had thought you might draw attention by a cry, or chew through your ropes, you might better abandon such vain hopes."

He saw that they understood, but he also noted that they seemed unmoved. It came to him now—and he had had the same sensation in dealing with all that ghostlike procession of white prisoners who had fallen into his hands—that there was a fundamental hardness, a kind of queer protecting armor with no chinks, about this race. An armor that do what he would, he had never been able to penetrate. And *ghazi* though he was, bitterly loathing all Unbelievers, he knew suddenly that it was not their Christianity he hated so much as their complete ability to remain unimpressed. To his surprise, the Mullah caught himself suppressing a flash of sheer admiration!

The party moved on. Within twenty minutes, on their high cliff, the turrets of Fort Maude were blackly outlined against a tranquil turquoise sky. Then the way dipped down and the fort was lost until, topping another steep rise, Les again saw the fort across the wide cleft of the Khyber. Almost at his feet was a dark patch he identified as the clump of deodars mentioned by the Mullah. From trees to the fort's walls, in a bee line, he estimated to be about three hundred yards: A conveniently close daylight range for tribal riflemen.

In another few moments they were in the copse, the resinously fragrant, cedary smell of the wood strong in the still evening air.

Les and Travis were expertly gagged, then freshly bound. But this time their arms were behind them; and their feet, hitherto free, were lashed together until bruised ankle bones ached protest.

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At the Mullah's direction, two long poles were cut. With businesslike alacrity the two were strung painfully on these, face down, like two large beads. Already the first of the box bearers were vanishing down the side of the Pass.

"The moment has arrived to say adieu," said the Mullah, "for I do not accompany those of my men who carry you and the explosive to the walls. Yet, picturing your state of mind, you may be sure I shall pass a most pleasant night here among the trees. If there is no explosion before dawn—ah, with what anxiety I shall look across to see if you have made good your escape." He gave their bonds a final inspection, laughed. "As to that, however, I believe any apprehension on my part will be quite groundless."

He gave the pole bearers a sign and they moved off noiselessly in the other's wake. After what seemed an interminable period of acute suffering, Les felt himself lowered to the ground. Travis was placed a few feet from him. Each was tied to the carrying ring of the nearest yellow box. The containers were spread about them in a kind of low breastwork, balanced upon each other in such a manner that any undue movement would topple at least one from its insecure base. And one would be enough!

The tribesmen took infinite pains with the arrangements. But at last they seemed satisfied, and the rattle of one small stone was the only sign of their withdrawal.

The final stages of this desperate business were at hand.

FOR some time, wracked with pain, Les lay absolutely motionless. Far above, he could just catch the brittle tap of the sentries' boots as they walked their beats. But as the Mullah had predicted, those beats did not bring them directly over the spot where the fliers lay.

Instinctively, the two inched their way together. It took an unbelievably long time to close that insignificant gap—the better part of an hour. For neither was quite sure of the amount of slack in the rope which tied him to his box, and both feared a sudden pull might spell the end. At length their shoulders touched although they were apparently in no better case than before.

Oddly, their wrist watches had been spared them. By straining up to look over Travis' body, Les could just discern the watch face on the *inside* of his wrist. The hands of both were bound palm outward.

The time was twelve-twenty. At this season that meant about three and a half hours to first dawn, or four hours to complete visibility. Was that four hours the remainder of a lifetime—two lifetimes?

Using extreme caution yet with purposeful tenacity, Travis was the first to begin a long struggle to free himself. Every little while Travis would pause briefly to look at Les. Those looks said, plain as if spoken: "Why don't you begin, too?" Travis had no inkling that Les' right arm was broken. To have told him was not Les' way.

At last Travis seemed to sense the futility of what he attempted, for with a muffled grunt he sank back.

That grunt! Little did he realize it was worth a thousand times all his pointless twisting and turning. For it suggested to Les a means of communication—a means the Mullah certainly never had foreseen.

They could not actually talk, true. *But they could grunt Morse.*

Les tried it out instantly with the two words:

"Grunt Morse."

"Great," Travis grunted back. "Never thought of it."

Greatly heartened, they stared at each other round-eyed. Now, if only this priceless discovery could be used to advantage!

"Think you loosened cords any?" Les asked.

"None. Seems hopeless."

"Been trying to bite through gag. No go."

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"Me, too. No good."

"Got to think of something."

"Right."

FOR most of the next hour they lay, thinking, thinking. It was nearly two thirty and Les' weary brain was going round in circles. Without conscious volition, his thoughts wandered back to the routine scenes at the flying field that morning. Coming on parade for dawn patrol he had felt a little guilty, for beneath his flying suit he wore pajamas—strictly against regulations.

Pajamas, pajamas. *Wait!*

That—why, it was barely possible that breach of discipline might prove their salvation. For Les remembered the package of cigarettes and the two books of matches in the breast pocket of his pajama coat.

Matches.

"Idea," Les grunted excitedly—and explained. *Burn their bonds.*

Equally excited, Travis lost no time in working himself around until, back to Les, his hands were near the trouser pocket slit in Les' flying suit. Crablike, Travis kept backing up until his bound wrists were through the slit.

"Keep on," Les urged. "You got about eight inches to go."

They strained, struggled, as much as they dared; Pappy's terrible soup was never far from their minds. Les tried to hike up his suit so that the slit would be nearer the pajama pocket, while Travis tried to help that and to pull down the pajama coat as well.

Travis was under the enormous disadvantage of trying to work backward.

Finally Les grunted: "One inch more and you'll get them."

Well, they could not gain that final inch. Short of an actual tear, the stout flying clothes had yielded as much as they were going to. And you simply could not tear cloth like that—probably not even with free hands, let alone a pair *bound* and behind you.

Panting, bathed in bitter sweat, as if by tacit consent they relaxed at the same instant. So near; it was heartbreaking.

Les glanced at Travis' watch. Another hour had slipped by. Remained rather less than one short hour more.

Then Travis had an idea. He rumbled:

"Can't tear suit. Try tear pajamas."

The struggle was renewed. After many minutes Travis seemed to get a good grip on the pajama coat and Les both felt and heard the thin broadcloth giving.

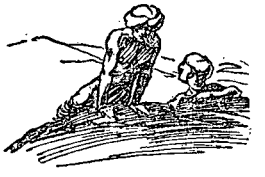
"Keep on," he encouraged.

Travis yanked and yanked until suddenly Les felt the garment parting. In triumph Travis wriggled clear with it, dropped it, turned to look.

This, the worst blow of all. They gazed down at most of the coat. But the vital part, the part they wanted, the pocket part, had remained *above* the tear. Surely, this was the last straw.

The time, three forty-five. Les nudged Travis, motioned east, toward India. Already the first pink streaks stained the cold gray of a cloudless sky. Dawn was almost on them.

"Guess just born unlucky," Les sent dispiritedly.



"Travis' hands would now never reach up to the torn edge of the coat. But they tried it, tried in desperation. His fingers were inches short of the goal.

For a few precious minutes they just lay, too discouraged to move.

Les had run dry of ideas. Travis apparently had, too.

"Good luck and good-by," Les groaned.

"Same to you, old chap."

The light was growing stronger. A small spot of green caught Les' eye. Whatever the object was, he was half lying on it. He rolled to investigate.

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The book of matches!

He sensed what must have happened; their struggles had dislodged one of the books from his pocket. It had slid down, following Travis' hands, to drop clear, unnoticed in the uncertain light.

The eyes of both blazed with new hope. Each had the thought that if *he* could be first to light a match, he would be able to start freeing the other.

Back to back they fumbled. Without being able to direct their hands by eye and much in each other's way, for some minutes they could not even relocate the matches.

Then, simultaneously, both touched the book.

A shot echoed through the pass. Their hours of grace were over.

It was not a good shot. They heard the bullet *wang* on rock and *thup* solidly into the fort's wall.

The very next shot might—

Les wondered whether those in the fort would investigate to discover at what the tribesmen were shooting. But he saw that the overhang at this point was just enough to shield the boxes and themselves from eyes above. No, the garrison would assume the shots fired by some half-crazed Afridis, full of religion and *bhang*—the cheap, potent drink of the bazaars. As the Mullah well knew, the chance of rescue from the fort was practically nil.

The next shot was wide, too, but closer.

Les and Travis continued their mad scrambling. Tantalizing! They had succeeded only to fail. And there was no time to experiment.

The trouble was, neither had the simultaneous use of both hands, because they were bound palm outward. Les, of course, had only one good hand anyway.

One man or the other would get the book up just so far and drop it, lose it—again, again, again. Excitement, a sense of time hideously limited, made them even clumsier.

Another shot. How could the Mullah's men keep missing that wide yellow target?

With the next shot Les felt Travis' involuntary jerk.

"Neck graze. Nothing," Travis signaled.

A KIND of fatalistic calmness came to Les. He picked up the match book firmly, rubbed it against Travis' hand.

"Take book. Hold tight so I can tear match and strike," Les grunted.

It was a trick of enormous difficulty, but they finally managed it. Both heard the welcome scrape of the matchhead across the safety tinder and the minute hiss and splutter as the match flamed. Les felt for Travis' bonds.

Travis winced and recoiled as the fire bit into his wrists instead. The movement snuffed out the match.

Then—the inexplicable.

A bullet plowed clear through the nearest yellow box. *And nothing happened.*

Were they dreaming?

Yet quickly recovering from the shock of that, the pair fiddled and fumbled to light another match. As before, Les was determined that Travis have the first chance of freedom, if any.

Les got the second match lighted and this time Travis stoically endured the licking flame with no more than a slight flinching. Sweat poured from him, but he succeeded in holding fairly still.

Travis felt a strand of his cords burn through, another, another—then the whole binding started to loosen. His wrists parted. His hands were actually free!

The match book still in his right hand, as he had held it for Les, he turned to face Les' back.

Les turned, too.

Travis lit a match and was starting to apply it to Les' ankles. But Les shook his head in violent protest, nodding toward Travis' bound legs and the cords which held him to his yellow box.

"Get free—run," Les insisted. The wasted match went out.

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To Travis, as perhaps to any man half free as was he, the impulse to escape that man made hell was all but irresistible. For the merest breath his dark eyes wavered. Then the quality in him asserted itself. He shook his head as decidedly as had Les.

They must win clear together—or not at all.

Briefly they stared at each other, both starkly conscious of the other's self-abnegation under frightful pressure. In that exchange, for the first time each saw the essential man—the one stripped of the foolish habits of careless, intemperate youth; the other, of his unfortunate air of smugness and, far more vitally, of his apparent cowardice. In so short a compass, not to be measured in units of time, may men come to know each other's souls.

But again Travis lit a match and again, adamant, Les drew away his feet. Only two matches remained.

Suddenly Travis changed his tactics completely. With the last of the matches, deliberately he freed his own legs and burned enough of the box cord so that he could tear the rest apart. With painful stiffness, he stood up.

"Now run, fool," Les grunted, eyes alight with satisfaction.

The Mullah's men saw that Travis was free. They began to lay down a wild barrage. Many of the yellow boxes were pierced! But no explosion.

Travis had no slightest intention of running—then. He struggled to untie the rope which bound Les to a box. The knots were hard and well tied. But Travis got them undone.

A bullet spanked dust from the wall an inch from Les' head.

Travis came close to him, got to his knees.

"Piggy back," Travis grunted through his gag, so firmly in place that he could not wrench it off. *Piggy back*—the childish phrase was the quickest way to convey his meaning.

Les understood well enough; tightly bound though he was, somehow every line of his body managed to register protest.

"Go," he grunted fiercely.

Then Travis picked him up, swung him over a shoulder like a sack of grain. And thus burdened, staggered toward a bend in the wall which meant safety.

Beside the pair, close, tribal bullets etched a dusty, moving pattern on the wall. The distance to go was a scant forty feet, but it could well have been miles. Weak from loss of blood, Travis stumbled to his knees. With enormous effort he rose, indomitably kept on.

The jutting corner brushed his shoulder. Les on top of him, he pitched full length—out of range.

But within range of the many curious, puzzled eyes which now filled every embrasure above.

UNABLE to be of any further service from the air to his captured subalterns the previous night, Captain Tommy Bates had secured permission to motor from Risalpur to Fort Maude. In his grave anxiety, he wanted to be in the vicinity.

And thus when the big gates on the Khyber side of the fort were opened, the captain was among the first to rush out to his young hopefuls, who seemingly had fallen into sight from nowhere.

The two were carried into the fort and placed on adjoining beds in the hospital bay.

Les Handley, wincing as the doctor set his wrist, had commenced telling his story to Tommy Bates the instant his gag was removed.

"And look," cried Les, pointing over to Travis' bed, "there's the chap I said was yellow. Remember, sir? Yellow! I said it so often, probably some of the others got to thinking it, too. Whatever I said, by God, there's the grandest, whitest fellow I've ever known!"

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Travis' neck had been dressed and bandaged. He heard what Les said. He rose shakily, came over and grasped Les' good left hand. "Never mind that," he told his superior. "All this idiot wanted me to do, was save myself at his expense. That's the kind *he* is!"

As for Tommy Bates, he nodded at both and smiled a wise, happy smile. Hadn't he always known the stuff his cubs were made of? Remained the utter mystery of those yellow boxes. It was quite beyond all three of them.

"At any rate," Tommy Bates informed them, "the Jat lancers sent out to look for you boys recovered the rest of that H.E. instead. Got it without firing a shot. Stuff came in late last night, just as I drove up here myself."

They became aware of a man who, despite his colonel's uniform and a row of decorations headed by the D.S.O., looked for all the world like an elderly garage mechanic.

"What's all this about my yellow boxes?" Pappy Dunphy demanded. A large piece of court plaster had replaced the bandage on his head. The doctor had let him get up because it was too much trouble to keep him in bed.

Les and Travis explained.

Pappy stroked a not over-cleanly shaven chin. His eyes twinkled.

"Nothing strange about their not exploding," he insisted.

"Nothing strange?" the fliers echoed.

"Why, hell, gentlemen," drawled Pappy, "did you think I'd take any Dunphy Special to blow up a dry old mud pile like Fort Susie? The regular stuff was more than powerful enough."

"But those yellow boxes—?" Travis began.

Pappy laughed in his slow way. "Over in our depot at Peshawar," he explained, "white ants got into the storeroom where all the kit-bags were kept. When we got the sudden order to go out and blow up Susie, not a bag in the place was fit for field service. No time to requisition a new lot. So my men put their kits in the yellow boxes to distinguish the clothing from the H.E. What's so complicated about that?"

"Good—God!" gasped Tommy Bates.

And as for Travis Mann, after all he'd been through, the news proved too much for him.

"I've never had a drink in my life," he said dazedly, "but something tells me, just this once, I'm going to get gloriously tight. How about it, Les—are you with me?"

For one with a record like his, Les seemed strangely reluctant.

"Well, I'll tag along to take care of you," he told his new friend diffidently, "but the fact is, Travis, out there under the wall I did a lot of heavy thinking. And until I feel a lot differently than I do now, me, I've sworn off."

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Buzzard vs. Cowtrack—for the Ice Hockey Championship of the Mohave Desert

BALDY SOURS AND SKATES AJAR

By CHARLES W. TYLER

Author of "Baldy Sours and the Woolly West," etc., etc.

CALIFORNIA has got two kinds of climate. Both of 'em is unusual. Out in the Mohave Desert last winter they was tyin' whiskey jugs to burros' necks to save pilgrims lost in the snow.

Desert rats had to drink wood alcohol, or they would of froze to death in the shade of Joshua trees. They found a prospector named "Zabriskie" Sack walkin' around a yucca, talkin' to hisself, an' they took him to a hospital at Barstow an' put a thermometer in his mouth an' it registered ten below zero.

Me an' "Baldy" Sours an' "Texas Joe," we was punchin' cattle for a spread up in the Pintwater country in Nevada, but along December the jackrabbits stopped carryin' water bags an' put on skis, an' we done figgered we should ought to go back to sunny California an' winter in Buzzard.

When we got down on the Mohave, we thought night was overtakin' us an' was goin' to spread our soogans, but a hombre come along an' says it was only the smudge.

Well, by the time we got to Buzzard it

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had started to rain, an' it rained so hard the Mohave River flowed on top of the ground. It rained in Buzzard for the first time in twenty-two years. There is a dry lake out on the flats, called Hell's Dance Hall, an' it had a foot of water on it.

About that time it started freezin'. Old man Blouse was comin' back from prospectin' over 'round Avawatz, an' he seen it shinin', but he thought it was just another mirage, on account of you allus think you can see water an' things on a dry lake.

Well, when this man, Jake Blouse, got out on the lake, him an' the jackasses started swappin' ends an' sheddin' beans, skillets, gold pans an' language until it was plumb ridiculous.

"Twitter" Burke allowed he'd been prospectin' sixty years, man an' boy, an' never seen burros move so fast before.

Anyhow, after that it snowed, an' then it blowed, an' there was cactus stickin' out of snowdrifts an' icicles on greasewood.

Over to Cowtrack, the Chamber of Commerce wrote to Washington to find out if the change was part of the new set-up, an' they got a letter back, blamin' it all on the Supreme Court. But it's an ill wind that don't blow somebody a new hat.

The old lady Bibb, who runs the general store in Buzzard, she wrote to McWard an' Sawbuck, orderin' a hundred pairs of mittens an' a hundred sets of full-fashioned onderdrawers an' some heavy-duty night shirts with woolen tails an' some ear-flaps an' two air-tight stoves, an' some goose grease an' liver pills.

That was what she ordered—that an' some more, but it wa'n't what she got. Maybe it was the old lady Bibb's writin', or, maybe they got the addresses mixed up.

A week later, Missus Bibb gets word from the depot at Cowtrack that her stuff had arrived, an' she sent "Gummy" McCarty over with a team.

WELL, there was thirty pairs of ice skates an' fifteen pairs of skis an' twenty-four sets of boxin' gloves an' some ribbed things for hombres legs an' a lot of sticks with crooks onto 'em an' six little round rubber doughnuts without a hole an' some bamboo canes with loops an' rings with rawhide lacin'. An' four toboggans.

The old lady Bibb, she heaved an' pawed amongst the stuff for a spell, breathin' through her nose, an' a lookin' for airtight stoves an' sheeplined drawers. An' about that time she swallered her cigarette, an' what it set fire to inside of her, you'd be mortified.

"Here we are, half nekkid!" she shrieks. "With the wind whistlin' up our britches—an' they send us dog-sleds." An' she hauls off an' kicks a toboggan.

Oh, yes—an' there was twelve pairs of shoes with iron claws onto the bottom of 'em.

The old lady Bibb grabbed a talk stick an' set out to write to McWard an' Sawbuck, but she just set fire to the paper, an' old man Burke said if she would open the door they could tune her in direct.

Well, the weather stayed cold, an' all we had to do was set around the old lady Bibb's *tienda* an' try to figger out what kind of people would wrangle these sort of dofunnies.

Titterin' Tight, who is Buzzard's apostle of learnin', he was makin' research some in a ten-year old copy of the *Police Gazette*, an' he come on a pitcher of a lot of hostile-lookin' jaspers with them crooked sticks chasin' a little black thing towards a chicken coop.

Old man Tight slapped his leg, as he read the wordin', an' he says, "Ice hockey, by damn!"

"Whut's ice hockey?" asts Gummy McCarty, pattin' up with his peg leg, bent on improvin' hisself mentally.

"Don't ye know nothin' scurcely, yuh hen-brained ole idjit?" snarled old man Sack. "It's between whar hoss poley leaves off an' golluf begins."

"As near as I kin make out," Titterin' is sayin', lookin' learned, "some hostile ga-

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loots hunt a flat dingus with walkin' sticks, an' any gent can dehorn as many hombres as he is able."

"Whuh-whuh-whut's the b-b-bounty?" Twitter Burke wanted to know. Twitter is missin' on about two spark plugs orally.

"In this yere rumpus," Titterin' says perusin' the piece, "it claims the local sher'fs is called on to quell the uprisin'."

Me an' Texas Joe's half-wit pardner, Baldy, we kind of gaze at the cobwebs an' the fly-specks, like men who have stunned themselves from an overdose of brains, an' Baldy ruminates: "D'ye reckon them rustlers over to Cowtrack ever heerd of this yere bootiful pastime?"

An' immediate the old lady Bibb blinks a couple of times an' pushes up her pug, an' you could almost hear things commencin' to rattle around in her skull.

She gazed at Baldy an' marveled, I guess, that a bow-legged hoot-nanny who spends his life augerin' that he's got more savvy than a cow could have a thing like that blossom on a barren plain.

"Wall, fer gosh sake," she says, "a body kin never tell what's under a buckit until they start lookin' for a candle."

We look in McWard an' Sawbuck's to get reference in regards to hockey implements, an' find a couple old sportin' magazines with pieces an' pitchers of some combats, from which we round up intelligence galore.

"If we could git them iggerunt hombres over to Cowtrack to indulge in a few of them here ice fiestas," Baldy told the old lady Bibb, practically overflowin' his banks mentally, "I bet yuh wouldn't have no trouble a-tall sellin' 'em some of the contraptions yuh got on your hands."

Titterin' Tight smacked his lips, an' he says: "Then Buzzard could challenge Cowtrack to come over Sattidy an' we would have a winter carnival."

"What tribe of cannibals did ye say?" chirked old "Flannel" Catchbolt, who has got a loose connection in his hearin' business.

"See?" groaned Texas Joe. "Now it's cannibals. I'm a man of peace, an' I'm ag'in it."

"Ye mean we would play Cowtrack a game of hookey?" old man McCarty asked Titterin'.

"Play 'em, hell!" yaps Baldy. "We will fight 'em—winner take all."

"Shorely," agrees the old lady Bibb, whettin' the palms of her hands. "A match."

"Yuh," Texas says. "That's what they set fire to dynamite with. What do we know about hossin' around with sleds on our feet. If I git out on that damn ice, I'm goin' to have skid chains."

ANYHOW, we took the pitchers of hombres playin' ice hockey over to Cowtrack, an' showed 'em to some jaspers in Saint Finnegan's Saloon. An' they look, an' then says to hell with it. In the first place, they says, they wouldn't be found dead in Buzzard, an' in the second place it's too damn cold to be monkeyin' around out on an iceberg the same as a tribe of bloody Eskimoos.

Well, we took precautions ag'in our plumbin' freezin' on the way home, this here likker being of a variety that a snake comes in every third drink. An' in a little while one of old man Kreeper's Straddle K punchers waxed simooltaneous, an' him an' Baldy sod-pawed a few an' locked horns.

Then Jake Blouse an' another Cowtrack gent tangled, an' pretty soon everybody surged outdoors an' the street was full of hoofs an' horns an' fur.

Bein' outnumbered—an' as it was gettin' late anyhow—the committee from Buzzard repaired to a reasonable safe distance an' beseeched them Cowtrackers to come over to our bailiwick an' we will knock back their ears so far they could use 'em for rudders.

In a couple of days some Cowtrack hombres came over to investigate this here game called skate crowkay. We showed

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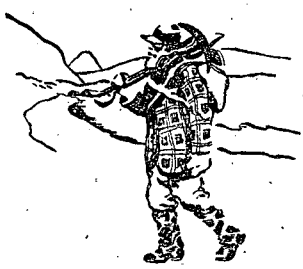
'em all the fancy apparatus which was in the old lady Bibb's store, an' they were completely devoured.

"How many rides does a peeler make before he kin gentle a pair of them ice things?" says Dooman Needy.

"All yuh got to do," expounds old man Tight, "is throw a squaw hitch an' mount



'em, an' you an' a mallet duck are practically related."

"What is these quilted things fer?" asks "Rimmy" Try, of Cowtrack, tryin' on a boxin' glove.

"Them is North Pole mittens," says the old lady Bibb. "Yuh put 'em on an' knock a hombre cold."

"I'll buy one," says Rimmy. An' he smirks at Baldy the same as a pelican would at a smelt.

DOOMAN NEEDY has got his snoot in amongst them shoes with the three-cornered iron calks. "What-all is these yere?" he says.

"I think they is Seven League Boots," the old lady Bibb says. "Or maybe it is Texas League. Jake Blouse is goin' to shoe his jackasses with 'em ontil the ice goes out of the Mohave Desert."

Well, the Cowtrack rep men, or delegates, they herd out on the gallery an' powwow some.

"They're plottin' ag'in the whites," says Titterin' Tight. "Look out fer 'em."

Pretty soon they come in, an' yuh could tell they was up to hell.

"I'll tell yuh what we'll do," Rimmy says to the old lady Bibb. "Cowtrack will play Buzzard a game of skate socker if you perwide the utensils, an' we will bet money that when night comes Buzzard is a lost tribe."

"All Buzzard furnishes is pallbearers," snarled the old lady Bibb. "What the hell d'ye think I'm a-runnin' here, a benefatory or somethin'? I'll *sell* yuh them skates an' bet ye the damn store ag'in the Cowtrack city hall that there ain't enough baskits in Cowtrack to carry home the pieces."

"That's fair enough," says Rimmy. "We'll see yuh an' raise yuh."

"Shorely," agrees Dooman Needy. "We will lay dinero on the line that Cowtrack ropes down an' hawg-ties Buzzard, an' kin show a hide fer every carcass."

"Stinky" Flowers, he was over from Cowtrack too. He is a slick one. If him an' an eel got together, the eel would think it had lived a misspent life. "I reckon it must take a lot of practisin' to l'arn to ride on these yere foot sleds," he says, sort of foxy.

"We ain't rode 'em none yit," admits Titterin' Tight.

"What is there to it?" Baldy says. "Yuh jist top 'em off—an' there yuh are. Simple as hell."

That cowboy was a prophet.

"Oh!" says Rimmy Try, commencin' to look around the store, the same as he practically owned the place right now.

"I want to know," says Stinky Flowers, lickin' his chops, "how much cash money would you gents like to put up on this refined amoozement called hockey?"

AFTER the Cowtrack cow-prods went home, the old lady Bibb scratched her neck, an' she says, "I kin smell tripe. But I don't know whar it is."

Well, old man Blouse, he picked out a pair of skates an' he says, just for the hell of it, he allows he will go down to the dry lake an' take a little spin. We all went with him.

After he got his feet in the stirrups, he stood up an' he says somebody had better

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commence him. So Texas Joe gits behind him an' gives him a shove.

Old man Blouse was off like a swaller, with both wings right out straight. His mouth popped open an' you could have shifted gears with his eyeballs. He picked up one foot, but he didn't have time to set it down. He started to holler, but his whiskers blew in his mouth.

Then he tried to turn around I guess, before he run into Mount Whitney, an' he begun makin' motions like he was, maybe, beckonin' to a hawk. He reversed directions twice, an' started backwards; then let loose his tail-holt on this hunk of clay an' clutched at the sky.

When he lit, he folded all his arms an' legs around his neck, an' it looked like an earthquake had destroyed a windmill. He bellered an' bounced, but he would of done better jumpin' off San Jacinto, on account of all he done was get altitude for another landin'.

"What's got into the frisky ole fool?" the old lady Bibb says. "I never seen such silly actions."

Well, we had to get a reata an' go out an' lasso him.

"Goddlemighty!" he screeched. "I'm practically demolished."

"Ye're a finished skater," opined old man Tight.

"I shore am," snorted Jake. "From now on."

"Yuh don't mean to tell me a couple of leetle hunks of steel like them'd lay yuh low?" the old lady Bibb says disgusted. "Fix my feet up in a pair an' I'll show ye suthin'."

An' she did. Mostly it was red flannel drawers an' petty-coots. Her pug come unwound, an' she capered a few before she threw a dally on Twitter Burke's old goose neck. He tried to buck loose, but she bull-dogged 'im just as complete as you could want.

Well, it took four hombres to connect the old lady Bibb, an' her an' a noon whistle was a pair.

Just then Baldy says, "Lissen! I have got a swell idea."

"You ain't got nothin'!" squalled the old lady Bibb. "Only your brain has exploded."

Anyhow, we hold palaver, on account of our seeing that this skatin' business is complicated, no end. We study them pitchers some more, an' figger it out that the hombres on skis with a cane in each hand must just be learnin'. An' they ain't got anything on us.

When old man McCarty brung over the mail from Cowtrack Wednesday, he has got a writin' hombre with him who come out from Los Angeles on account of roomer having reached 'em, he says, that the rival fractions of Cowtrack an' Buzzard is goin' to have a hockey game.

This feller says if a snake bit a cowboy, it wouldn't be news, but if a cowboy bit a snake, everybody would feel sorry for the snake.

So he says he's goin' to write a piece tellin' how a lot of cow-punchers an' old prospectors out into the middle of the Mohave Desert is swappin' their cayuses an' jackasses for skates.

IT SEEMS like the snow carnivals, which would of taken place at Big Pines an' Lake Arrowhead an' Big Bear next week end had got to be postponed because the roads wa'n't all plowed out, an' the toorusts would be disappointed if they couldn't go some place an' stand around and shiver.

The writin' jasper allows there prob'ly wa'n't nothin' like it conceived before—denizens of the desert stage a winter carnival for the edification of mankind, he says—an' there prob'ly won't ever be nothin' like it ag'in.

Gentlemen, hark!

Saturday mornin' some hombres come over from Cowtrack to see that everythin' was bein' did accordin' to the prescriptions, an' to practice skatin' some, because there ain't no place to get on a skate

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in Cowtrack, except in the Saint Finnegan Saloon an' "Nose-paint" Charley's place.

Rimmy Try, from Cowtrack, wants to know what have we got that is stationary that we can use for goals.

An' Titterin' Tight says what's the matter with a couple of burros, because there couldn't be anythin' more stationary than one of them Death Valley canaries, unless it was two of 'em. An' he says they will prob'ly bray now an' then, an' the glady-eaters can tell where-at the home port is.

"We kin wrop sacks onto their feet," Titterin' says, "so's they won't skid."

"Shorely," agree Rimmy, "an' then we kin tell 'em apart from the Buzzard hockey players."

Just as quick as we pull old man Tight loose from Rimmy Try, we decide who is goin' to be the arbitrators. Gummy McCarty claims he is goin' to be head diplomat, on account of Cowtrack being so crooked the only way Buzzard can win is to be crookeder.

"Who the hell ever heerd of a one-legged referee in a ice socker game?" snarled Stinky Flowers. "If you was buried tomorrer, you'd come up a cottonwood tree."

Gummy patted the ground with his wooden leg, an' he hollered: "Git away from me, ye ole squirt 'fore I git out of control."

Well, Stinky an' Gummy was finally elected empires, an' we appoint that newspaper hombre from Los Angeles to referee the empires.

The goal wranglers was goin' to be Twitter Burke an' Dooman Needy, respectably. They would wear skis an' could have their choice of either boxin' gloves or clubs. All they had got to do was stay on the frontier an' defend their country.

The goals was a mile apart, an' their names was Kentunkey-Blossom an' Clementine. There was twelve combatants to each side. We would of had more, but we had to keep some skates for the reenforcements.

BY SATURDAY noon dudes, desert rats an' chuck-liners was comin' from all directions, the same as buzzards would if they get wind that a elephant had died in the Mohave Sink.

A swivel-dude wanted to know if there was goin' to be any openin' ceremonies, an' me an' Texas Joe's simple pardner, Sampson Sebastian Sours, says "Shore!" an' christens a Straddle K puncher by hittin' him on the head with a beer bottle.

The old lady Bibb had got out the hearse in case of accident, an' the Sheepherders' Band played "Root Hog or Die."

Gummy McCarty threw up a silver dollar to see which team defends the north jackass, an' everybody dived for the money. As quick as the Buzzard team got out on the ice, most of 'em jackknifed. They immertated everythin' but hombres on skates, an' the cheerin' was unanimous, on account of I guess folks thought they was doin' tricks.

Old man Catchbolt is about six verses behind the palaver, on account of he can hear just as good as a mile-post on the Union Pacific, an' when a gent pulled a gun he capered up an' bust the timekeeper on the prow.

Finally the feller get enough of his buttons back to shoot off the gun, an' a sublime spectacle unfolded. Everybody thought they was an Apache an' commence war-whoopin'. Both sides has got sticks, like the formula, an' they couldn't a done better if they had tommyhawks—only it would have been finished sooner.

Old Man McCarty has got a skate on his meat leg, but his wooden one is adrift. He is wearin' a six-shooter an' a baseball catcher's mask. Stinky Flowers has got on hair pants, a belly protector an' one boxin' glove, but he had the stummick pad on the wrong end.

Just then Gummy McCarty seen four hombres on the Cowtrack team who could skate, an' he commenced bellerin' "Foul!" at the top of his lungs. But Whiskey Bill patted his faithful Colt-gun, an' he says to

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hell with 'em; a six-smoke whittles all men to one size.

Old man Tight made a couple of jumps an' his feet squirted up in the air so high he looked like the man on the flyin' trapeze. He lit so hard that the concussion broke winders in Las Vegas. As quick as he can joint himself, he glares around to see who done that to him, an' he spies Rimmy Try swoopin' by just as graceful as a giraft with limber leg.

Titterin' took a swipe at Rimmy, but he missed an' whirled around four times an' bopped a Cowtrack brave who wore the iron of "Vinegar" Vine. This man, Vine, would of killed old man Tight gladly, but he had got too much velocity an' he continued his sleigh ride to a spot where Baldy was tryin' to haze his herd of feet an' skates all in one direction instead of six.

"So it's you?" chirked Vinegar, who abominated Baldy no end. An' he spraddled out his legs like a busted hoop an' wound up his hickory sprout.

"Jist one pecooliarity, yuh sheep stealer!" cheepered Baldy, thrashin' around with his arms to keep from fallin' on the end of his ridgepole. "Jist one, an' I'll splice yore bugle to the end of this slat the same as a limb grow on a tree."

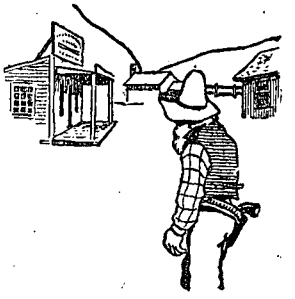
They make a few passes, but before their efforts bear fruit, they have skidded so far apart they couldn't of hit each other with a 44-40.

Old "Gone-ag'in" Goode, who played on our side, was makin' more motions with his paddle than a Digger Injun shootin' the rapids, an' he finally run aground right spat on old man Kreeper's tail-feathers.

"Why don't ye go whar ye're lookin', ye old buzzard?" screeched cowman Kreeper. "Git yander. Can't ye see I'm after the puck?" An' he pushed Gone-ag'in in the whiskers.

"By the whinneyin' Joodas!" squalled old man Goode, "if it's a puck ye're after, it's a puck ye'll git!" An' he wound his hockey pole around this Cowtrack hombre's gullet the same as you put a dally on the horn.

At this here intrustin' junction, Stinky Flowers started buglin' that them antics ain't accordin' to the League of Nations a little bit, an' he is goin' to penalize Buzzard two dollars an' the tax.



"I calls it a foul!" pants Stinky, doin' the dance of the seven wonders. "Didn't I see that malemute tryin' to commit arson?"

One of them expert skaters Cowtrack rung in on us keeps yellin', "Shoot the puck! Shoot the puck over here!"

"Ye're damn tootin'!" hollers Whiskey Bill. "An' I'm jist the sod-bustin' ole porkypine thet kin do it." An' he threw down with his six-auger, but he missed the puck an' the bullet rickets off the ice an' tunnels Whittle Withers' Stetson.

WELL, by now all them refined dudes is jumpin' up an' down an' screechin' for more blood—except four ladies who'd fainted.

A Cowtrack nimrod taken a wallop at that there puck, which was boundin' along, an' he couldn't done a better with a carbine. The puck flew through the air an' pinked Texas Joe in the smeller. That was just the same as woundin' a moose. Texas made honkin' noises, an' started to chop down one "Tulip" Towers with his hockey ax.

Just then Twitter Burke looked up the lake an' here come them Cowtrack top-hands just a-yippin', whackin' the little rubber thing in front of 'em.

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Twitter knows a lot of words but he can't play 'em on his organ. He flourished some, boundin' up an' down on his sleds, an' reverberatin' like an empty barn.

The old lady Bibb is lopin' along an' a-wailin' because it looked like Cowtrack would capture the Buzzard fort.

"Come on, yuh ole badgers!" she hoots. "What's the matter with ye? Ain't ye got no invigorous? Git up on yore feet an' whack 'em a-tween the horns!"

Everybody is now a-headin' for the Buzzard goal, an' the air is so full of skates an' hockey clubs an' Levi pants that you can't see the sun. You talk about stampedes—them an' long-horn cattle. The writin' galoot from Los Angeles, who is supposed to be head judge, they run over him the same as a freight train would a switch. When he reeled onto his feet, he had got more tracks on him than the Old Spanish Trail.

By now Twitter Burke is all wropped up in his skis an' poles an' trinkets, an' what I mean, he is a commotion. In the meantime, Baldy Sebastian Sours has treadled hisself up to about eighty miles an hour, and the only thing between Hidalgo Sours an' the Foonrul Mountains is Twitter Burke.

"Git out of me way, ye old varmint!" trumpets Baldy.

"To huh-huh-hell with ye!" throbs Twitter. "Uh-uh-I kain't gug-git out of my own wuh-way."

Just then one of old man Burke's skis ketches one of Baldy's shins, an' they embark. Me, I close my eyes an' shudder.

Well, it looked bad. Them fancy skaters from Cowtrack is ridin' hard on that puck at a lope, an' they're hollerin' an' laughin', on account of it's so easy. All they got to do is hit the flat rubber dingus between the front an' hind legs of the jackass, an' they tally score.

Just as a couple of 'em is gettin' in position, old Gone-ag'in Goode come wingin' by a-hootin'. Kentunkey-Blossom open one eye drowsy, an' seen old man Goode, an' I guess the burro thought they was goin' prospectin', the same as last time—an' the Buzzard goal post shifted ears an' start after Gone-ag'in.

THAT made the Cowtrack puck wranglers miss Kentunkey-Blossom by four foot, an' the score remain at love nobody, like in long tennis.

"The goal post moved!" howled Rimmy Try. "Old man Goode vampired his booraw."

"The hell he did!" hooted old man McCarty. "I'm the vampire!"

"*Umpire,* yuh pod-augered ole hoss's-neck," yaps the old lady Bibb.

Stinky Flowers, he claims foul, mayhem, sabotage an' mootiny on the boundin' main. He invite Gummy to come out from behind his cage an' he will renovate him from cellar to garret.

Everybody is a-millin' an' a-cheerin' in uniform, and the odds is now four to one that Cowtrack wins the polo game an' eight to three that Buzzard ain't visible to the naked eye by sunset. The speculators all says that nobody could stop them four-star skaters which Cowtrack imported, an' the score would prob'ly be ninety-an'-nine minus the late lamented.

But the old lady Bibb is troopin' around wavin' money under the snoots of the folks, offerin' to bet 'em that Buzzard unlimbers them buckharas from Cowtrack the same as takin' two from twice.

The newspaper gent an' some more, they sort out the umpires an' get the north goal post back where it belonged an' look to see if the time-keeper is still tickin'.

The Buzzard team hold parley. The old lady Bibb comes patterin' up, an' she says, "Whisper, now's yore chance. I have bet all our wampum. Git them thar tractor boots, *muy pronto!*"

I high-tail after our hole cards, which we had cached in the jockey box of an old chuck waggin, an' me an' Baldy an' Texas Joe, bein' a whole pile handy with a hungry loop, we throw our feet in the shoes

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with the spikes an' grab us a handful of Manila yacht line apiece, an' prowl forth.

The tally gringo shoots his gun, an' everybody whoops delighted.

One of the Cowtrack fancy skaters gets the puck an' he starts swishin' toward Baldy, makin' bird calls. Just then Sampson Sebastian flips out a noose an' builds a loop, an' belly-ropes Buzzard public enemy No. 1.

Baldy heels back an' sits on the lass-rope, an' the slack goes *whap!* An' this jasper swaps ends—an' both skates pop right off his feet. Holy cow!

Whittle Withers falls over the rope, an' he whinneys like a mustang. His hockey paddle flies through the air an' ketches old man Kreeper between the legs. Well, that was just like you'd throw a monkey wrench at a buzz-saw.

Old man Kreeper's ox-horn mustache purls back over his shoulders, an' right now he has got more wing-spread than a mail plane. "Good God!" he hollers. "I've been bushwhacked!"

He lit an' bounced into Stinky Flowers' lap. Stinky's mouth flew open so wide you could see his underwear, an' they tell me hogs in Kansas started for California when they heard him callin'.

TEXAS JOE yippered a couple of times an' spun him a hole with his reata, an' ketched one of them strangers who were skating for Cowtrack by a fore an' hind leg, but before Texas get his piggin' string an' hog-tied 'im, the jasper heaved to his feet an' the last anybody ever saw of him he was trompin' rabbits to death in El Cajon Pass.

Titterin' Tight pushed on his pedals an' he was goin' so fast he looked like three brothers, an' he was squawkin', "Git the puck!"

An' Jake Blouse says, "Whut puck?"

Whiskey Bill seen it an' hit it a bust toward Clementine, the south goal. Rimmy Try had lost one skate an' he was goin' in an orbit, the same as the sign of the zodiac, an' he finally reached his conclusion by meshin' with Gummy McCarty, an' that was just as good as runnin' into the North Pole.

Me, I look around for stray cattle, an' who-all do I behold but Vinegar Vine, caperin' by. I shake some coils out, an' dab a hoolihan on his off foot, an' is he mortified. When he wobbles into a sittin' position, his eyes is crossed an' he is singin', "Git along little dogie, git along."

Old Flannel Catchbolt has just got the general drift of this sportin' activity, an' he whacks the puck. We are now in Cowtrack territory an' approachin' Clementine. The old lady Bibb is just as good as Old Faithful geezar. Her pug is a-bouncin', an' she is squallin':

"Hooraw fer my side! Ain't they a-purty?"

"Hooraw fer hell!" yowls old man Kreeper. "They're jist a lot of damn vultoors. Lookit me—I'm practical gnawed to the bone."

Dooman Needy, the Cowtrack goal keeper, an' a few more toomultuous hombres, they flourish war clubs a few, but we convert 'em the same as the white man done the Injun—by knockin' down their ears.

In the meantime, that little rubber thing yuh play this man's checkers with has become mislaid. Old man Goode happens to look, an' he says:

"Whut in Tophet is the dum boo-raw eatin'?"

Holy cow! Clementine had et the puck.

That was fair enough. Everybody allowed when the puck got in the goal, that's a score. An' so Buzzard won the ice hockey champeenship of the Mohave Desert.

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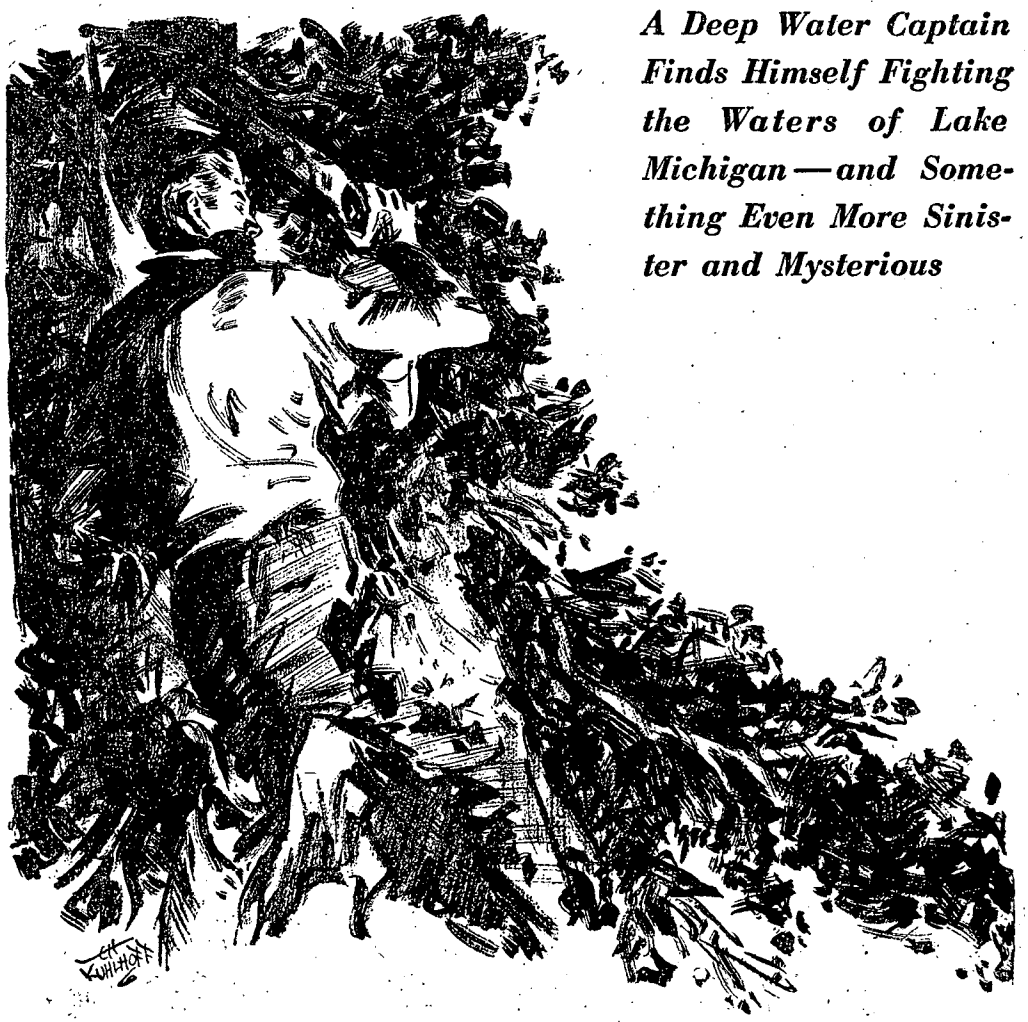

A Deep Water Captain Finds Himself Fighting the Waters of Lake Michigan—and Something Even More Sinister and Mysterious

THE ISLES OF DOOM

In Two Parts—PART I

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Old Dog Head," "An Enemy at the Dinner Table," etc.

CHAPTER I

A JAUNDICED yellow sunset tinted the waves of the Straits of Mackinac as a chill wind sent brief squalls racing across the water to raise that short, uneasy chop so typical of the Great Lakes and sent a frown to the brow of a broad shouldered young man who stood on the bows of the three masted schooner, *Indian Queen.*

Clutching the fore shrouds, he let his long, serge clad body sway easily to the restless motion of the ship as he studied the distant shore. He was deciding that he had never seen a less hospitable or a more uninviting coast in his life, for yon-

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der dark rocks tortured the rollers beating lazily at the foot of high sand dunes that were crested with gloomy looking pines and firs.

At the protesting whine of a hard-strained block, he threw back a well modelled, black-haired head to glance aloft and study the set of the patched and weather-beaten canvas. Next he cast a thoughtful eye at a series of ragged, gray clouds which, springing into being from below the lead-hued bosom of Lake Michigan, came rushing up from the Northeast like squadrons of charging cavalry.

With brow still furrowed, he secured the bright brass buttons of his double-breasted blue serge jacket, then took a quick turn across the deck, walking without the least awkwardness, while the wind whipped his wide trousers legs with brief, breathless blasts.

"You seem to be right at home, Mister. It's all I can do to stand."

The tall young man in blue halted, his serge clad body swaying in ceaseless readjustment to the sharp pitching of the *Indian Queen*. Deliberately, but without offence, his dark eyes, clear and black as those of any Indian, swept the speaker and saw a round little man with a ginger-colored goatee and a pink moon of a face. He wore an old blue army overcoat made over for civilian wear and a floppy brimmed brown straw hat, which he held on with difficulty.

"Yes," said the bigger man with a brief smile that curved a wide, narrow-lipped mouth that was firm without being harsh, "I'm a sailor, so to speak."

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"Well, well, I deeclare," continued the other, obviously eager to talk. "Ain't that interesting? Be you out o' Deetroit or mebbe Saginaw?"

"Neither," replied he with the long, weather-beaten features as his eyes again searched that forbidding shore line. "I'm what they call a blue water sailor; master o' a China packet to be exact."

THE little man's round and pink features manifested elaborate surprise, then he expertly sent a spurt of tobacco juice twirling downwind. He cocked a beady, speculative eye at the mahogany-faced sea captain.

"Blue water, and a master, eh? You 'pears almighty young to be a master. Where ye for?"

"Charlevoix, perhaps—maybe Traverse City."

"So? Well, what do you think o' our lakes here, and our lake sailormen?"

The tall young man shrugged diffidently and again studied the set of the canvas, against which the windward reef points now rattled like drumsticks.

"Haven't had time to rightly tell yet. But expect they're not so different from the blue water men."

The speaker nodded to the slate gray waves that were commencing to cast an occasional spatter of water over the scarred white rail of the *Indian Queen*. "This is a nasty chop that's rising, and no mistake."

"Aye, it's short and sharp," the other agreed. "And it racks a ship awful bad—so the ship masters say.

"They fear these head waters o' the lakes, they do—for its treacherous as to wind and water, both. Many a good ship has come to grief hereabouts. These here Straits of Mackinac are rockier nor a Mormon's heart."

A close observer might have noticed that the young sea captain's surprisingly quick dark eyes flickered briefly sidewise and that a new interest crept into his manner as he raised a broad brown hand to tug absently at not very thick black sideburns—one of which only half hid a crescent shaped, red-brown scar.

"Mormons? Are there Mormons hereabouts? I thought they were all down in Missouri and Kansas."

"Most of them are, but a passel of them came up here five year ago under King Strang—'twas him who brought them up here. In 1848 he first came in these parts—God curse the day—"

"You don't seem to like them." The sea captain's features seemed suddenly very Indian-like and his eyes unescapably direct.

The other looked up, confused, startled and a little fearful. "Oh, I—I ain't meaning anything against the Mormons," he said with a nervous laugh that sounded very hollow. "The Mormons is all right."

"Your opinion seems changeable," remarked the big figure in serge. "But don't worry, I'm not one."

"Well, that's a relief," sighed he in the old army overcoat. "I'm a Baptist—Dr. Paul Ackeroyd, now inhabiting the beautiful and growin' metropolis o' Charlevoix. And you are—?"

"I'm Captain Roger Lincoln o' Salem town."

From the corner of his eye Lincoln noted the approach of two of the other passengers. Bending their bodies against the wind, they came near, struggling to keep on black, bell-crowned hats and dodging, none too gracefully, restless dashes of spray, which the rising wind flipped over the bows. Both men, he noted, wore long black frock coats and brown trousers tucked into heavy cowhide boots. They were long of limb and of feature, Lincoln could see that when they peered to the south with a curious intensity, for the setting sun lit their heavy features more clearly.

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"Aye," Dr. Ackeroyd was babbling on, "we've got Mormons here, and they're a bad lot—or rather the leaders of them are. Truth is, I've many a Mormon friend I'm proud to own; but as for their woman-hunting king and his hell crew of devils, miscalled 'apostles', I'd as lief—"

DR. ACKEROYD'S discourse ended abruptly and Roger Lincoln was shoved roughly sidewise as the larger of the long faced passengers leaped by and, venting a hoarse growl of rage, seized the amazed little doctor in the army overcoat and bore him back against the rail, with both bony hands gripping Dr. Ackeroyd's throat.

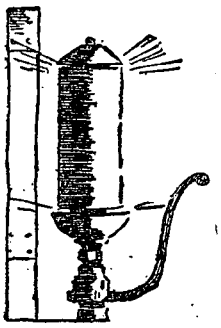
In that brief instant the sea captain's all-seeing eye noted two interesting items; first, that the deck was deserted save for the four of them, and second, that the man in black carried a sheath knife and a brace of derringers stuck into his wide leather belt.

"Woe unto thee, child of Lucifer," the attacker was panting. "How dare ye, in your black ignorance, blaspheme the appointed of Jehovah and the interpreters of the word of God? Woe, I—"

The words became lost as the first Mormon, a powerful black browed fellow, choked his victim with efforts so strenuous that his bell crowned hat fell off, leaving long lank hair to fly wild in the freshening wind.

A fraction of an instant Roger Lincoln coolly estimated the situation while the clumsy cowhide shoes of both men beat a dull and frenzied tattoo on the scarred deck; then, with the powerful ease of a champion boxer, the sea captain sprang forward, gripped the black-haired Mormon's shoulder and would have pulled him from the much smaller doctor, had not the second Mormon suddenly struck him without the least warning.

The blow was a shrewd one and would have felled a less hardy physique, for it caught the sea captain full on the side of his lean, bronzed head; but Roger Lincoln merely blinked and shook his head a little as, with the speed of a flung harpoon, he turned and sprang at his assailant. With a deliberate, well-timed blow that appeared neither very hard nor very long, he sent the second Mormon, a red



haired, heavy-jowled fellow, reeling back over the spray wetted decks with his coat tails flapping grotesquely about his butternut colored trousers and his hands wavering in a wild effort to maintain his balance.

"Maybe that'll learn ye manners," he remarked without a touch of heat.

Then in two swift strides Lincoln whirled, seized Dr. Ackeroyd's antagonist by the collar and wrenched him violently about, to deal him a brief, smacking uppercut that dropped the black haired aggressor senseless to the deck. Meanwhile, little Dr. Ackeroyd, his collar ripped apart, could only cling to the rail and try to draw breath into his lungs.

AS SUDDENLY as he had galvanized into action, Roger Lincoln relaxed. "Feel better, Doctor?" When the other nodded, he cast a brief glance at the sprawled figure on the spray wetted decking. "Guess I hit the big fellow pretty hard," he murmured almost regretfully. "'Twouldn't have hurt a sailor, but—"

He stooped and was about to raise the

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unconscious Mormon when, from the corner of his ceaselessly roving eye, he glimpsed a swift moving figure; the freckled Mormon had recovered and, teeth bared in a murderous grin, he came bounding forward. In his hand gleamed the evilly blue, well proportioned blade of a bowie knife.

Dr. Ackeroyd tried to cry out as the sea captain's muscle-corded hand leaped to his belt and there gripped the butt of a short barreled pistol—but, all at once, it came away, empty. Roger Lincoln remained where he was, gathered like a sprinter awaiting the starting signal, his head outthrust, jet eyes narrowly watching the furious Mormon who, with knife point presented, crept near, growling:

"It means death to smite an apostle of the true church. Prepare to die, dog of a Gentile!"

Anticipating to a fraction of a second the Mormon's spring, the sea captain's hand shot with incredible swiftness to the rail and, all in one motion, he plucked from it a belaying pin which, with an expert twist, he sent flying at his enemy. After whirling like a pinwheel, the stout, oaken pin caught the red-haired Mormon squarely on the forehead with a dull *thock!* that was clearly audible.

As though jerked by wires, both of the Mormon's arms flew up and in full stride he staggered and lost his grip on the bowie knife which sailed in a brief arc across the deck and came to rest sticking in the scarred deck planks, with its rawhide wrapped hilt trembling perceptibly.

"So you'd be a fool twice, would you?" With a grim smile, Captain Roger Lincoln watched his stunned adversary crumple heavily forward on his face, crushing the dark haired Mormon's high crowned hat. "Better learn to fight, my bucko, before you ask for trouble. A third rate crimp could teach you things."

"Good God, what have you done, Captain," chattered Dr. Ackeroyd, his china blue eyes grown wide as those of a child before a Christmas tree. "Why—why—they'll kill you for this. Many a man's been done to death for less, hereabouts."

An unshaven sailor in a mangy coonskin cap came running up, looking very frightened. He halted, staring in horrified surprise. "So help me, Hannah, if you ain't layed out a brace o' Mormon elders. No one can say I'd anything to do with it." So saying the sailor shambled hurriedly away, followed by Roger Lincoln's puzzled smile.

"And now, friend Ackeroyd, that this slight interruption is ended," remarked the sea captain, "what was it you were observing about these ill-mannered Mormons?"

"N-nothing—I—I'll say nothing more. You don't know what you've done."

THE sea captain was totally at a loss to understand the expression of the round faced little doctor who was now nervously massaging his reddened throat while he stood gazing in mingled hatred and fear at the two unconscious men who lay awkwardly sprawled on the none-too-clean decks of the *Indian Queen*. Odd, how their black clad bodies responded sullenly to the increasing pitch and twist of the schooner—they looked like overgrown toys abandoned by children.

"It seems," observed Lincoln with an amused smile, "that you've never seen a couple of bullies knocked out before."

"I have," muttered the other, backing away fearfully. "But not two elders o' the Mormon church. Good God, sir, you don't know what it means up this way."

"Mormons or not, they were troublesome and interrupted a conversation which I found both pleasant and instructive and I don't permit that. Come, pull yourself together, Doctor, I've manhandled far tougher rascals than these Bible-pounding knaves. They asked for trouble and so they deserved the fate of

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all bullies." So saying, Lincoln, who now looked more Indian-like than ever, retrieved his peaked cap from the scuppers and set it back on his thick black hair.

"You—you don't understand," persisted Doctor Ackeroyd. "I live at Charlevoix and the Danites will visit me, maybe—" He impulsively took the amazed sea captain's hand. "I—I thank you for your help.

"In return I'll give you the most earnest advice you've ever been given. It is—don't leave the *Indian Queen* till she fetches at least to Saint Joe or Chicago."

The speaker started and almost scuttled away when the first Mormon stirred, groaned, half raised himself, then looked up and fixed on the sea captain a look so deadly, so venomous, that even Roger Lincoln, all too familiar with the brutal and vile aspects of human nature, felt his heart skip a beat. On the apostle's cleaver-sharp, deeply lined and passion blanched features he read a threat which was fanatical in its intensity and deadly in its intent.

"The curse of Asmodens on thee, dog of a Gentile!" snarled the dark apostle through teeth that were neither white nor even. "Verily, I say unto thee, the Lord shall deliver thee unto the wrath of the Danites and the sword of Azrael shall smite thee low." Glowering through the lank strands of dark hair that had fallen over his white and protuberant forehead, the Mormon elder extended a quivering forefinger. "Thou shalt be as the dust beneath the feet of the ox, and the chariot wheels of the Egyptian shall pass over thy body!"

"Enough of your blasphemous cant—I fear neither you nor your cursings—but your yelping annoys me!"

His wide mouth setting itself in a tight line, Lincoln came moving quickly, lightly, across the deck, unheeding of the frantic pleas of the *Indian Queen's* boatswain who now appeared.

"Let be, sir, for God's sake, let be! The Mormons are a power hereabouts and a law to themselves."

"Power or no," came the sea captain's deliberate answer, "this fellow and the other rascal began the trouble. Now you, with your jumble of Biblical phrases, stow your gab — keep it for farmers, clerks and women. Silence, I say or I'll beat you into a jelly! I know your breed."

Tall and dangerous, he bore down upon the stalwart elder who, though in every way larger and more powerful than the lithe sea captain, backed away, mumbling to himself.

THUS matters stood when the captain of the *Indian Queen* came running forward, his pale blue eyes uncertain and anxious. He saw an interesting tableau against the sickly sunset—there swayed the Mormon elder half in and half out of his flapping black coat, with his long hair dishevelled and his black shoe-string necktie streaming loose; calm, alert and dominant, the trim young sea captain confronted him and half bestrode the other Mormon.

Obviously fearful of the results of the affray, Captain Bartlett made peace as best he could, but the thunderbrowed Mormons were in no wise mollified and stamped aft, dodging the violent sheets of spray that now came hurtling over the pointed bows of the *Indian Queen.*

"You're the Captain Lincoln that came aboard of us at Mackinac for Charlevoix, ain't you?" sourly inquired Captain Bartlett as he returned from ordering the mainsail to be stowed.

"Yes—I took passage to Charlevoix. Why?"

"Well, ye're not getting off there."

Captain Lincoln stiffened. "And why, pray?"

"They'd kill you within an hour—I know them Mormons."

"Nevertheless, Captain, I am going ashore at Charlevoix."

"You're not."

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"I am," said Lincoln quietly. "I advise you not to try to stop me."

"We'll see about that. And I wish ye hadn't had this trouble aboard my vessel —it's like to cost me a mart o' trade."

He broke off uncertainly to scan the darkening horizon. "It looks like a blow tonight. Maybe we'll put into the lee o' Waugoshance Point yonder; I don't know though, maybe Traverse City would be better."

"Well," remarked Lincoln, "while you're debating, it might be a good idea to put a couple of reefs in your foresail. On the ocean we'd call that a mighty mean-looking sky."

"D'ye think so? I—well, I don't like Lake Michigan—like Erie better." Then it apparently occurred to the schooner's captain that he was losing face, as one of Lincoln's Chinese agents would say. "And who are you to tell me how to run my ship?" he demanded.

ROGER LINCOLN'S blue clad shoulder rose in a brief shrug. "No offense, Captain. I'm a blue water sailor, and when the sky's like this on the ocean, I know we're in for a bad blow. Of course, here on the lakes it likely means something different."

Mollified, the master of the *Indian Queen* relaxed. "Well, it happens you're right, we're in for a bad night and no mistake about it. I'll be mighty pleased when we weather Waugoshance Point. Guess I'll have a talk with Mr. Hovey, my mate. No, sir, I don't like the look of the sky to the nor'east."

And Lincoln, glancing at the straining, weather-stained canvas and strumming shrouds, felt very ready to agree.

"Yes, we may have to put in Sturgeon Bay if the weather gets much worse, or maybe Sleeping Bear Cove. It's all rock shore hereabouts; not sand like in the lower lake. What did you want in Charlevoix, Captain?"

"That's as may be," was Lincoln's reply, but he said it with a smile that removed the sting from his refusal to reply. "I'm trying to find a man last heard of hereabouts. Besides that, I'd like to locate the wreck of a certain ship."

"And what ship might that be?" inquired Captain Bartlett, whose fox-like face was framed in a ragged halo of dark reddish whiskers.

"The brig *Pemaquid.*"

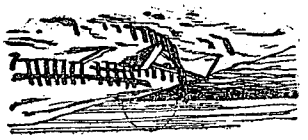
"The *Pemaquid?*" Captain Bartlett ruminated a moment while the crew, under the profane supervision of Mr. Hovey, the mate, lowered and stowed the violently threshing mainsail, once the schooner had been brought into the wind. "Let me see. Oh yes, that was the vessel what was lost nigh on a year ago. Hey Eben!" he beckoned a gap toothed sailor. "Whereat was the *Pemaquid* lost?"

"Tweren't so far from here, sir," replied the seaman. "'Twas on the coast of Beaver Island. Lost with all hands she was—they was pulling corpses out o' the watter for a week."

Something in the speaker's voice prompted Lincoln to look at him more closely.

"You be'ent thinking of going there?"

"Yes. I'm much interested in the loss of the *Pemaquid.*"



"Too bad, 'cause Beaver Island is one place you can't go," put in Captain Bartlett shortly.

"Why not?" Surprise crept into the sea captain's lean, weather-beaten cheeks and his face, at once so young and so old, fell into serious lines.

"Why? It would be your death to go on that island after what happened just now. Just like it'd be your death to land at Charlevoix."

"Mormons on Beaver?"

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"Nothing but Mormons. They won't let a Gentile, as they calls folks that ain't Mormons, land on Beaver nohow."

Captain Roger Lincoln drew a deep breath and his teeth glimmered in a smile. "Too bad that they feel so strong on the subject—I guess they're going to have some unwelcome company soon."

Chapter II

A SIMPLE, badly cooked meal served that night in the stale smelling little cabin of the *Indian Queen* proved to be even gloomier and more cheerless than Roger Lincoln had anticipated. The Mormons tramped in sullenly, their big bodies seeming to fill the little cabin. The red haired man was nursing a long, livid lump on his forehead and the hatchet-faced elder, a badly swollen jaw. They hunched over the spotted red and white tablecloth and wolfed their food without uttering a word. Only Lincoln and Captain Bartlett made any effort to maintain the conversation.

The rest of the passengers appeared but briefly and included a couple of salesmen, who were going to Ludington, and a tired looking woman with two little girls, whose destination was Chicago. Apparently these last suffered from the sickening lift and heave of the lake and the smell of frying ham in the adjoining galley, for they swallowed a couple of mouthfuls and then beat an unsteady and hasty retreat.

All during the repast Lincoln could feel the hostile eyes of the two Mormons boring into him as they crouched over their food, eating hugely and audibly.

He returned their black looks stare for stare, at the same time wondering whether there was not a trace of uneasiness mingled with their sullen manner. Why should they be uneasy? The sea captain's curiosity was further piqued when they paused before leaving to intently study a chart tacked to the cabin's greasy, green painted walls.

"Where are we now?" Lincoln inquired as he pushed aside the empty chairs and stretched out his long legs, while heaving a sigh of relief. He wondered about Captain Bartlett—the fellow seemed very restless and nervous; he also had an annoying habit of sucking at his tobacco stained teeth.

"Coming up to Waugoshance Point," the lake captain replied morosely as he pulled out a quill toothpick and set to work. "It's a mean part of the lake—damned mean. I'm hoping that the weather will be better once we're around it. Too bad we've got an off-shore wind, else I'd try to run in the lee of the mainland in Sturgeon Bay."

"Try? Seems to me this schooner should point well enough."

Captain Bartlett nodded absently as he swilled the last of his coffee from the saucer.

A silence then ensued in which the creak and rattle of the lantern, swaying in wide arcs overhead, sounded very loud as it sent queer black shadows leaping swiftly about the stuffy little cabin which reeked of stale food and bilge water. The schooner's timbers groaned like a soul in pain and whined with the surge of waves while spray drummed incessantly against ports.

OBEYING a subconscious impulse, Roger Lincoln arose and strove to memorize that section of the chart which showed the headwaters of Lake Michigan. There, at the left, lay a long, club-shaped island labelled "Beaver Island" in strong, black characters—a red dot on its upper end indicated the presence of a light house. Beaver Island! He felt a queer excitement grip him.

However, there were other and more immediate problems, for instance that vague and persistent sense of alarm which filled him. He tried to analyze it

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and came to the conclusion that Captain Bartlett failed to instill him with confidence, either as a sailor or as an honest man. The bald-headed lake captain left too many decisions to his mate, seemed undecided, and otherwise betrayed those small, infallible signs of a man not sure of himself. Or was this uncertainty assumed? For the life of him Lincoln could not tell.

"Where will you go if the wind gets any worse?"

Captain Bartlett wiped his mouth on his cuff, dried his ginger-colored chin whiskers, then shrugged mackinawed shoulders that were damp with the spindrift which was now patterning loud on the decks above.

"Well, I ain't quite yet made up my mind, Captain."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea? It's black as Egypt out and there's a nasty sea running. Of course, it's your ship and not mine."

The master of the *Indian Queen* cast his passenger a slow, curious glance, then fell to plying his toothpick again.

"Well, if it gets no worse than this, the old *Indian Queen*'ll stand it without no trouble." The speaker laughed uneasily. "You see you square-rig sailors don't nohow realize how quick a fore-and-after can come about, nor how close a packet like this can sail to the wind. No, I—well I ain't worryin' yet."

THE heavy crop of black curls crowning Roger Lincoln's head stirred as he nodded.

"You know your business," Lincoln said, "but just the same, with a rocky shore all about and a treacherous wind like this, I'd be on deck and taking a sounding or two. The Malacca Straits are wider than these of Mackinac and I—"

"Well, Capt'n, don't you worry—hey, Luke," turning his bald head, Captain Bartlett bellowed at the galley door, "fetch me some more o' that slop you call coffee."

The slatternly Negro steward presently shuffled into sight. "Yassuh. Better have it now, Cappen, because I cain't keep the ol' pot on the fire no longer nohow, sah. Dat's a powerful rough sea outside, Cappen."

"Coon's scared," observed Lincoln as he pulled out and commenced to load a battered little porcelain pipe. "His eyes are all whites."

"Gets scared easy, like most Niggers," quoth Captain Bartlett with valor on his lips but with an uneasy gleam in his pale blue eyes. "Don't worry, Capt'n, Mr. Hovey'll let me know if things get bad."

The sea captain nodded briefly as he mused on the singular aspect of a master taking his comfort below, while his ship plunged into a rising gale. He could scarcely imagine himself drinking coffee in the trig, mahogany finished cabin of the clean lined *Flying Star*—crack clipper of the Black Ball Line—while Mr. Crane ran the tea packet through a gale in the China Sea.

He settled back, bracing his knees against the table leg to steady himself against the violent plunging of the *Indian Queen*. He was aware that Captain Bartlett was now eyeing him with shrewd curiosity.

"I'm wondering if you'd maybe answer a couple of questions?"

"Maybe I will, and maybe I won't," replied he in the snug-fitting blue serge coat, while minute puffs of blue smoke rose from his pipe like the smoke from the stack of a laboring locomotive.

"No offense, I was only wondering." Captain Bartlett's round, hair framed features were elaborately casual as he leaned across the food spotted tablecloth. "Interested in the *Pemaquid*, be you? Only her, or the other ships that's been lost among the Islands?"

The smoke suddenly ceased rising from Lincoln's pipe, but he otherwise

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manifested no interest. Better be careful —the man across the table was driving at something.

"How's that?" was all he said.

"Well, three years come next Easter, the *Midnight Sun,* a right smart brigantine out of Montreal, runnin' before a howlin' nor'wester, ran aground and broke up with all hands—lost on the north end o' Garden Island, that's above Beaver.

"Last year the *Sewell S. Watts* was wrecked on Hog Island one dark night during a equinox storm. Her folks was drowned to the last man, so no one came to know how old man Salter—who was a right smart skipper—come to pile her up."

AS Captain Bartlett launched into a detailed and gruesome account of the loss of the *Sewell S. Watts,* the listener settled back deeper in his chair. So Salters had been a good skipper, too—like his own father, Arad Lincoln, a skipper known for his sea sense and good judgment.

Strange that the *Pemaquid* also should have shattered herself on the rocky shore of this lonely group of islands. Queer, too, that she had been reported lost with all hands.

In his mind's eye Roger Lincoln could recall how he had learned the tragic news. There he was, loaded down with strange and precious gifts accumulated during his ten month's cruise to China and the East Indies. He could see himself hurrying from the dock in Boston, eager to see again the white, ivy grown home in sleepy old Salem.

He could feel again that premonitory chill which had trickled down his spine at the sight of his mother, pale and drawn, in her widow's weeds. Nor was Chloë, so recently become a grown up, there to greet him. In the house were only little Enoch, aged five, and his sister Elizabeth, just turned twelve.

He recalled his pitifully inadequate efforts to comfort his mother, his subterfuges to make her think less of the loss of the *Pemaquid* and the greater loss of her husband and Chloë, eighteen and as graceful and beautiful as a red winged black bird.

Chloë, how he had missed the sparkling play of her great Spanish eyes, inherited from their mother—she who had been the Señorita de Santa Anna, daughter of an Argentine grandee and heiress to a million rich acres in South America. Yes, Elena de Santa Anna had gladly given it all up to marry a blond, broad-shouldered daredevil of a Yankee sea captain.

In the space of an instant he saw the white picket gate before the house open hesitantly and a curious, weather-beaten old man come up the walk that was bordered with sea shells from India.

"You be Captain Lincoln?" the old dried apple of a man had asked.

"Yes?"

"Well, I be out o' Ludington—Ludington on Lake Michigan. I be a fisherman —for white fish and perch mostly—and last month my net brought in a little bottle. I see a piece o' paper inside—and there was writin' on it. Well, sir, I takes it home for Reverend Gray, our minister, to read. He read part o' it, but he couldn't read it all. Here—"

Ever so clearly Roger Lincoln could see that toil-warped hand thrusting forward a ragged square of water-stained paper.

Even now he could feel a return of the fierce excitement that had surged through his brain as he saw hastily scrawled across the top of the fragment of paper:

> "To finder of bottle Captain Roger Lincoln of Salem, Mass. will pay five hundred dollars for delivery of this note."

Below it appeared a series of those

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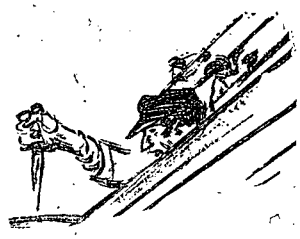
strange symbols and characters which had told the amazed young sea captain that the message could not be a fraud. Those strange symbols were of a code by which the seafaring men of the Lincoln family transmitted among themselves secret information concerning trade and other items of interest.



Yes, as he sat smoking in the stuffy little cabin of the *Indian Queen*, there rang in his ears the amazing message he had deciphered:

"Roger, my son, for God's sake come at once—On one of Beaver Islands—a horrible fate threatens us. Every hour brings death nearer. A. L."

And that was all he knew.

Abruptly the bronzed young man straightened his serge clad body and aroused himself from this fleeting summary of the past. What was it Captain Bartlett was saying as he swayed in his armchair, with his bald head glimmering dully in the lamplight?

"We been runnin' into a heap o' bad luck hereabouts recently. Four years back was the first wreck. 'Twas in a howling, blinding snowstorm Luke Warner's *Great Superior* was lost on the southeastern coast o' High Island—that's one o' the Beavers, too. And all of her people was drowned. When the *South Wind* went down last year, a few of her people got to shore and the Mormons treated them survivors right well—though they didn't waste time in grabbing all the salvage there was. You see, Capt'n, the Mormons ain't all bad—not by a long shot. Most of them is simple, law-abiding folks, kind and neighborly; it's their leaders that's so hard."

As Lincoln opened his mouth to speak, the *Indian Queen* lost her rhythmic, though violent, motion and commenced to pitch and buck for all the world like a gigantic mustang.

"What's that?" Lincoln sprang to his feet, dark eyes intent.

"'Tain't nothin' but the cross seas off Waugoshance—but they're right bad tonight."

"What causes them?" the younger man uneasily demanded as he put away his pipe.

Captain Bartlett laughed, but there was a false note to his affected amusement. "Don't get upsot, Cap'n. What causes 'em? Well, you see the wind blows down through the Straits of Mackinac in one direction and the same wind, followin' up the shore o' Lake Michigan, goes off on a bias, so to speak. When the two sets o' waves meet it sets up a mighty mean cross-sea hereabouts."

LINCOLN started to pace restlessly up and down, fighting to conquer a growing uneasiness. Why did his sailor's instinct refuse to be quiet? All at once an especially heavy sea threw the laboring schooner far over on her port side, whereupon coffee cups, tableware and all went smashing to the floor with a resounding crash. From somewhere aloft sounded a loud, resounding *crack!*

"Something's carried away," Lincoln snapped and glanced sharply at Captain Bartlett, the whites of whose eyes were very prominent all of a sudden.

"I—I guess a boom's gone."

"Well, aren't you going up on deck to find out about it?"

"Not yet—it's perishing cold up there. It's Mr. Hovey's watch and he's capable. Besides I—"

There commenced alongside an ominous thumping and a scraping sound which prompted Lincoln to reach for an

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oilskin coat that swayed crazily from its peg.

"Come on, you fool," he snapped and his mouth took on a pitying twist. "You've got a mast overside and it'll be staving your bilges in a minute."

Reluctantly and a little fearfully, Captain Bartlett slipped his square, ungainly body into a set of stained orange-yellow oilskins.

"'Tain't nothin'," he muttered. "We'll clear away and mebbe we'll try for Sturgeon Bay—though there ain't nothin' to fear."

Followed by the coldly contemptuous sea captain, Captain Bartlett climbed the companionway ladder and opened the companion door, only to curse and draw back when a torrent of wind-lashed spray splashed in, dripping from step to step and marking the cabin decking with dark, irregular lines.

"A living gale and no mistake," thought Lincoln as, hand over hand, he climbed to the schooner's poop. "The fool ought never to have left the deck."

Bending his sou'westered head into the wind, Captain Bartlett clumped off forward, now and then steadying himself at the starboard rail when the *Indian Queen* gave one of her sickening plunges. Bareheaded and with only the oilskin coat to protect him, Lincoln paused on the poop not far from the wheel and, taking a firm grip on a thrumming stay that was cold and wet as a snail, he stared about in wonder. He realized he was beholding a phenomenon which is far from common on the Seven Seas.

Two mighty series of shadowy waves, each traveling at right angles to each other, were colliding with terrific force. All about the racked and laboring schooner he could see vague black masses of water, queerly distorted, that hurled towering jets of spray high in the air. Scourged by the wind, the waters were twisting, curling and boiling about each other.

By the last dim rays of daylight, Roger Lincoln's eyes could barely distinguish the bows of the *Indian Queen*, for the lake was now utterly black save for sudden, hissing whitecaps which roared along the rail and pounded a mass of shapeless wreckage riding heavily under the blows.

Tight-lipped and gripped with anxiety, Lincoln could see the mainmast and the mizzen, but the foremast, so invaluable in the maneuvering of a ship, had vanished. Apparently the spar had split and broken off at the cross trees, retaining only a weird tangle of snapped lines and braces that streamed in this aerial maelstrom like ribbons from a devil's maypole.

With only the reefed mizzen sail giving the schooner a little headway, the *Indian Queen* wallowed piteously, sullenly, as though resentful at being tossed from one cone-like wave to another. The situation was serious, there was no doubt of it, for the twisting and buckling of the hapless vessel threatened to send the weakened mainmast overboard at any minute.

With the spray-laden wind buffeting his face and stinging his legs, Lincoln strove to understand the schooner's predicament. He looked forward to discover the crew, an indistinct black mass of figures, chopping desperately at the fallen mast which trailed alongside. He saw Bartlett's dim figure bearing down on them, could hear him shouting something.

"Plenty o' men forward," he decided, "so maybe I'll be some use at the wheel in case anything else goes wrong."

OVER the rope-cluttered deck, which was at times knee deep in water, the sea captain made his way aft, to find a single shivering seaman tugging for dear life on the spokes of the *Indian Queen's* helm, in an effort to keep her slatting mizzen full. As he drew near Lincoln could barely distinguish the fellow's brown and dripping features by the dull

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glow of the binnacle light. He looked very frightened and screamed something about "the islands to leeward."

As though shaken by titanic hands, the *Indian Queen* staggered on through the darkness and only now and then could the chilled and drenched men at the wheel catch the dull thudding of axes, busy as they hacked at the shrouds and wildly threshing canvas of the wrecked foremast.

"She'll ride better when—clear away—wreck," yelled the quartermaster and ducked as a wave sprang up over the schooner's side and pounded on the deck for all the world like a ghostly tiger.

Now the wrecked foremast, held by inaccessible stays, was now trailing alongside, presenting a danger of which Roger Lincoln was fully aware. Should the schooner, in one of her mad plunges, fall on top of the mast, her bilges would certainly be stove in and in that case—well, he was too much of a seaman to imagine that there would be any survivors.

It was just when the wrecked mast had been nearly cut away that the tragedy happened. Lincoln saw, looming up out of the lowering murk like a wall of doom, a mountainous freak wave which, born of that raging cross-sea, came rushing and leaping forward at express train speed. With a curious spiral motion it flew at the crippled schooner like a ramming ship and took the unlucky *Indian Queen* squarely on the port bow.

"Hang on!" Lincoln had just time to bellow the warning to the quartermaster as that murderous boiling wave came roaring over the bows like a savage boarder.

The sea captain, as he clung with all his strength to a stanchion, had kaleidoscope glimpses of the men forward being caught amid the seething rush of white water. Then the wave roared aft and sprang upon him. Although he was strong and with arms and muscles toughened by many stern years at sea, he was, nevertheless, almost torn loose and swept overboard.

Icy water hissed and frothed in his face; eyes, ears and nose were smothered and his body was lifted, hammered and twisted against the rail. Aware that death himself was tugging at his legs, Lincoln clung to the stanchion with that abnormal strength kind Nature lends men in danger of their lives.

Suddenly the wave was by and he could breathe again. Dizzied and disoriented, he could only gasp for a moment, but then he groped for the deck, found his feet and struggled up to find himself apparently alone on the schooner's deck. The quartermaster had vanished from his side. The only sign of life was a voice crying faintly, despairingly, from amid the turbulent waters astern.

Fortunately both of the remaining masts survived that devastating blow and the schooner's bows, freed of the encumbering wreckage, now rode higher, with the broken bowsprit stabbing at the lowering heavens like a stubby black finger.

Without delay Lincoln lashed the wheel so that the sodden mizzen sail kept the crippled schooner under way, then, stung by spray, fought his way forward to hammer frantically on the forecastle companionway and bellow into the depths

"On deck! Everybody on deck! You'll sink else!"

No one appeared. So, cursing the cowardice of the crew, Lincoln swung below to find only one old man and two half-grown boys—all helpless with fright. He had forgotten that schooners do not require as large a crew as a square-rigged ship.

He argued only a minute then, when they still objected, he drove them on deck with a vigorous and expert use of boots and fists. Stationing the old man at the helm, he set the youths to casting the stops off the mainsail, with instructions to triple reef it. Then he stalked below, dripping and with jaw set in grim lines,

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advanced on the passengers' quarters and came on Dr. Ackeroyd first. The little physician pluckily and promptly responded to his appeal.

"'Course I'll go on deck, Captain. What do you want me to do?"

"Relieve the old man at the wheel and send him forward to sound the well—I want to know if the *Queen's* making water.

"We'll be damned lucky if that infernal foremast hasn't stove in the bottom, somewhere. Where are the Mormons?"

"Three doors down on the right—be careful, Captain."

"To hell with them! They'll turn to like the rest of us."

THEN Roger Lincoln took his way along the narrow passage with his dripping body readjusting itself to the sickening plunges of the schooner. He halted before a plain wooden door and rapped on it loudly, imperatively.

"Who's there?" came a voice, harsh and unpleasant as the rasp of steel striking stone.

"Captain Lincoln. Come on deck at once. The ship is in grave danger."

"When we are in the Lord's hand there can be no danger. Go back to your master, Beelzebub," snarled the voice within.

"Will you open this door?"

"No—do so at your peril."

Over the sea captain's gaunt features crept a taut, bitter expression. Deliberately he jerked out the long barreled Colt which he habitually wore in his waist band; then drew himself back and, scientifically applying his full weight at the same instant, burst the lock of the cabin. Inside stood the two Mormons, very startled that the door should open so promptly, their heavy features shining yellow in the light of the sea lamp which cast wild shadows as it turned and twisted on its gimbals.

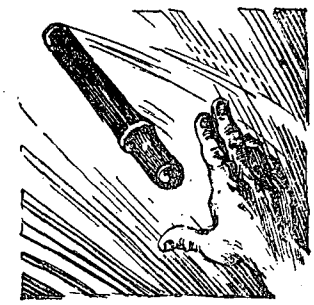
"I wouldn't." The dripping figure in the doorway spoke with accents that cracked like snapping hawsers. "Raise your hands!"

The red-haired Mormon's hand had darted towards the bosom of his black frock coat, but it paused when he beheld that menacing black muzzle in line with his small blue eyes.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I'm wanting men on deck!"

"You'll get no help from us, Gentile," snapped the black-haired Mormon with an assumption of dignity. "We'll lend no aid to the servants of Lucifer, nor will we question the will of the Lord."



"Will you not? I beg to differ, reverend sir. This revolver has six shots. To convince you that it's loaded and that I know how to use it I'm going to trim your greasy hair just below your left ear; then," he paused, "if you don't listen to reason I'll drill you through the heart and your precious friend next. Because you have strange religious ideas gives you no right to risk the lives of our fellow passengers. Will you come?"

"Nay," growled the black-haired Mormon with murder in his close-set jet eyes. "We are in the hands of the Lord who giveth and taketh away. We fear not—"

"You'll soon be in the hands of the devil," snapped the sea captain who, with his long body swaying sharply with the motion of the ship, deliberately raised his long barreled weapon.

"One!" he snapped and his voice was drowned out by the deafening roar of the pistol. *Smack!* sounded the bullet.

Through the drifting smoke Lincoln,

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grim faced, could see that the Mormon's features were very pale as a lock of his hair went floating downwards.

"Now," demanded Roger Lincoln, narrow eyed and with his wet cheek bones very prominent, "will you do as you're told, or must I—?"

"We will go," growled the black-haired Mormon sullenly—and they went.

"Drop your guns on the bunk."

WHEN they obeyed, Lincoln stuck them in his waist belt and signaled his prisoners out into the corridor. The fanaticism of the Mormons, Lincoln noted when they gained the turbulent deck, stood them in good stead. Resigned to death, they kept their heads and did what the sea captain ordered.

On returning to the wheel Lincoln found the binnacle light smashed and extinguished, so he had not the faintest idea of how the schooner headed, nor whither the howling gale was driving her.

"Aimin' to try for Charlevoix?" bellowed Dr. Ackeroyd above the keening wind.

"Compass smashed—don't know which way is which," came Lincoln's reply. "Going—try—rig—sea anchor. Only chance to ride it out, lost if—drive ashore."

But Lincoln was appalled to discover how the decks had been swept by that savage wave. There remained not three objects of sufficient size which could be lashed together to form a drag. As he fought his way back aft, Lincoln noticed the elder Mormon standing at the taff rail, peering off to the right.

"A light! Praise God in Zion," he yelled, his deep set eyes glowing behind the fringe of black hair that beat into his eyes.

Then, with a warm flood of joy coursing through his chilled body, Lincoln glimpsed a tiny bright pin point of light. Now it was visible, now it was obscured by the hillock-like waves.

Though his eyes constantly became filled with tears from the fierce rush of the gale, he watched that light, hoping to get its blink interval. Soon he discovered that it did not blink at all but shone a steady yellow-red. He cupped his hands and turned to Dr. Ackeroyd who, grotesquely attired in an oil-skin coat many sizes too large, flapped about the quarter-deck like a child playing in its father's clothes.

"What light—that?" he yelled.

"Don't know. Traverse City, Harbor Springs, Charlevoix or Saint James, maybe."

"Saint James? On Beaver Island?"

"Aye."

Saint James! Lincoln frowned in the dark. A nice reception he would get if the *Indian Queen* limped into the Mormon capital and the apostles got ashore to tell their story. The proverbial short shrift would be in order. Well, they would not get to shore if it could be helped.

Meanwhile he scanned the rest of the Stygian horizon, but could see no light save the steady red-yellow one ahead. For a moment he debated before heading the schooner towards it. If that were on Beaver Island it would be fatal to his plans to arrive there in this manner. It was vitally important that he land on the island mentioned in Arad Lincoln's letter unobtrusively, and not under his own name. If he took the *Indian Queen* in now, perhaps his own life and that of the father he sought would pay for it.

But conscience twinged him; aboard were ten or twelve people over whom he had taken command—that faded woman and her little girls, for instance. Personal considerations were as nothing to them, it was his duty to bring the *Indian Queen* to safety. And, perhaps he was getting upset over nothing—that light could just as well be at one of the other points Dr. Ackeroyd had mentioned.

Accordingly, Lincoln hauled at the cold wet spokes of the wheel and, setting his body, held the floundering *Indian Queen*

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towards the light after sending all hands below to work the pumps, for the old seaman had run up shaking with fear to report that the plunging of the wrecked foremast had apparently started several planks below the schooner's water line.

Chapter III

THE *Indian Queen* was leaking too badly to admit delay of any kind and Roger Lincoln observed with rising anxiety that her bows now lifted sullenly and that the schooner seemed to plow through, rather than ride over the white crested rollers before which she fled.

At the substitute captain's side Dr. Ackeroyd clung to the mizzen sheet and stared anxiously through the dim darkness.

"Have—watch close," he bellowed above the wet rush of the wind. "If it's Charlevoix or Saint James—pass—light to—left, but—it's Traverse City or Harbor Springs—pass—right!"

"Water's getting shallow," shouted the captain as he nodded vigorously. "Must be further inshore than I thought."

He could tell this by the altered lift and fall of the schooner. The waves, too, were becoming steeper—another sure sign.

Instantly Lincoln turned and snatched a tin foghorn from its rack beside the binnacle and thrust it into the little doctor's hands, yelling, "Quick, get for'ard and watch—light for your life. If I'm to pass—right, sound the horn once; if I'm to pass to the left, blow twice. Quick! Getting damned shallow!"

With his chilled hands tightly gripping the wet wooden wheel handles, Lincoln watched the little doctor struggle forward, along the streaming deck his army overcoat fluttering like a burst sail.

The Mormons and the others of his scratch crew he glimpsed hard at work in the waist, reeving emergency stays under the direction of the boatswain, but he soon forgot all about them in leaning forward, eyes narrowed and fixed on that yellow-red splash of light ahead.

He hoped Ackeroyd would not delay much longer, for the waves were becoming mountainous now, smashing and crashing under the *Indian Queen's* square stern, driving her ahead light mighty fist blows. Suddenly one comber broke, sprang over the stern, under the gig which swayed there from its davits and sent an icy stream coursing down Lincoln's neck. He flinched at this cold caress, but listened harder than ever.

"Ought to blow quick—damned fool ought to allow me more time to clear the light."

Nearer and nearer plunged the schooner and now he could glimpse the blurred black outline of a shore line. The light was very bright, seen through the wind-driven spindrift. *Why in hell didn't Dr. Ackeroyd sound that foghorn?* Good God, didn't the idiot know a man couldn't turn a crippled schooner like a racing yacht? All at once he heard the horn wailing through the wind—*Gra-a-a-h!*

He set himself to whirl the wheel to the left—waited. *Gra-a-a-h!* To port then! But suddenly there followed three more imperative, sudden blasts.

"Five blasts! God blast that fool, he's forgotten!" So near was the dimly seen shore line now, that an icy hand seemed to seize and squeeze his heart.

Then, with terrifying suddenness, the *Indian Queen* drove onto the rocks with a racking, grinding, shuddering *cr-r-r-unch!* that halted the schooner dead in her tracks and set the weakened mainmast to reeling like a drunken man.

Tightly gripping the spokes of the wheel, Roger Lincoln sensed the trap into which the Indian Queen had fallen when, with the abruptness of a magician's trick, the guiding light totally vanished, all at once deserting the doomed vessel to wind filled blackness.

"Wreckers!" groaned the sea captain and he heard the wings of the Dark Angel

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beating low above the betrayed schooner. All was spray and darkness now, and an immense confusion followed as a series of mighty combers drove the shattered *Indian Queen* higher on the rocky shore.

Crack! Like a falling tree the mainmast toppled forward, amid a loud snapping of stays and dragged with it the mizzen. From the waist arose shrill, terrified shouts that were tragically brief as along the shore now appeared many small dancing lights. That much the sea captain saw while, chattering with cold, he stripped off his oilskins and serge coat.

He had just gotten rid of his second shoe when a wave, cold as an arctic current, engulfed him and in a trice whirled him off the deck. He knew better than to struggle and so allowed himself to be borne whither the boiling waters listed.

Keeping his breath as long as he could, he at last struggled upwards, snatched a lungful of mingled spray and air, then felt himself whirled over and over, experiencing much the same sensations as he had when as a boy, he had rolled down the low green hills behind quiet old Salem town.

THERE was no way of telling how long he was whirled through the breakers, but at last he struck a rock with a sickening impact which sent an agonizing pain shooting through his left side. Fiery wheels spun crazily before his eyes and he thought himself lost when he found something smooth and hard was beneath him. Sand.

After shaking his head to rid his eyes of water, he caught a momentary glimpse of a row of shadowy pines, bent and lashed by the fury of the northeast gale. Then, with his last ounce of strength, he crawled on hands and knees up the yielding sand of the beach away from those cold waves which still licked hungrily at him like the tongues of so many voracious wolves.

When he was clear of the icy water, he collapsed and, for a space, lay flat, panting, though every breath sent through him a pang of sharp pain. It was the same kind of pain as a sharp toothache, he reflected dully, only infinitely greater. What dragged him back from the unconsciousness into which he was lapsing was the sound of brief reports off to the left. What were they—signal guns? No. The reports were too brief, too high pitched, more like rifles or pistols. Then he guessed.

"So they're murdering the survivors as they come ashore," he told himself.

Though instinct urged him to escape at once, it was quite impossible to find strength to do more than to remain unconscious; but when a pair of palely glimmering lanterns commenced to flash among the rocks off to the left, he fought his way up the beach by sheer will-power, leaving a deep, tragic trail in the wet sand.

The fugitive had just plunged into the shelter of a grove of birches, when the first lantern came into view, then another. They were carried by bearded men who were armed with guns and who came scrambling hurriedly over the rocks. Lincoln, as he forced his way into the thicket, heard a voice shouting above the wind.

"Look sharp now—got to get 'em all. One loose tongue and we'll hang!"

Shivering, wretched as ever he had been in all his tempestuous career, Lincoln peered through the leaves and watched the methodic advance of six long limbed men along the beach.

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Where was he, the survivor wondered while he crawled off into the forest. On what island had the wreckers rigged their treacherous light? Or was he on a desolate stretch of the mainland?

Suddenly one of the lantern bearers halted and bent over, holding his light close to the damp sand.

"Hey! Look at those tracks! One of 'em has come ashore. Quick, boys, into the woods—got to get him! Caleb, tell the rest to drop the salvage and come a-running!"

The feeble, battered fugitive in the underbrush paused just long enough to see the wreckers grip their guns and turn in the direction of the woods, then by a superhuman effort he staggered to his feet and limped blindly off through the forest.

"There he goes!" shouted one and a rifle cracked, sending a bullet to crackle through the branches on a level with Lincoln's ear.

Instantly, deep, excited shouts arose on all sides as the other wreckers joined in the chase. Never, instinct warned the hunted sea captain, had he been in greater danger. Lost, hurt and exhausted, he was surely doomed should the searchers press their hunt. He knew now how a buck feels when he hears the first yelp of the hounds on his scent.

"Maybe I've got one good sprint left in me," he mumbled and, recklessly gambling on this, he started off into the pine forest at a lumbering run.

After struggling perhaps a hundred yards into the sighing depths of the forest with branches slashing at his face and tripping his feet, he came upon a gigantic fir, the branches of which gripped him like an octopus. Those lights were gaining now and the yells were louder, so, without an instant's delay, he parted the branches and clambered heavily upwards. He found it hard work, for the pitch stuck to his hands and the sharp needles slashed at his head and eyes. Lucky the branches were so close together.

"Maybe they won't see me," he choked as, unable to climb higher, he clung panting close to the pitchy fir trunk. "If they do, they'll shoot me down like a 'coon out of a basswood."

His hopes wavered and sank when the row of lanterns commenced to converge unerringly on that clump of pines in which grew his sheltering tree. Good God there must be at least a dozen men below—and they all wanted very much to kill him!

He felt very sick—must have swallowed a lot of water and sand, the grit was still in his teeth. He would feel a lot better if he could vomit; but he could not do that now. He must try to hold on and forget how much his wounded side hurt him. Never since he had had typhoid had he felt so weak. He almost laughed at the idea of Captain Lincoln, hard-fisted master of the *Flying Star,* being as weak as a new-born puppy.

THROUGH a haze of pain he watched the lanterns, like gigantic fireflies, come bobbing through the underbrush. But they were not fireflies, not by a long shot—fireflies did not carry long barreled rifles. How would a firefly look with a rifle, he wondered.

His arm about the tree trunk tightened as a gaunt individual, clad in a close-fitting black felt hat, drew near, carefully studying the forest floor. Then another man, squat and evil featured, appeared, and another, until in all some ten or twelve wreckers paused beneath the swaying fir to which Roger Lincoln clung with all his ebbing strength.

He hardly breathed, though the boom of the not distant surf and the sighing of the tree branches drowned out any noise which was not loud. That was silly—he must be getting light headed. They would kill him if they saw him, his brain kept saying. No wonder; they all knew he had seen enough to hang every one of them down there on the ground. Who were they? Then he heard their voices.

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"Guess he's made for the swamp. We'd better go that way—"

"No he hain't," cut in a nasal voice. "I bet he's paralleling the beach, so as not to get lost. Damn it, Jared, use your head."

"Well, we've got to find him," said the man who had first appeared, "or we'll all hang. I told you we wasn't covering enough o' the beach. Right along I been scared to death something like this would happen."

"Stow your gab, Dutch, you talk too damned much. What are we going to do? He's got maybe a big lead by this time, and we won't catch him lest we get some dogs."

"Dogs? Don't be a fool, scent won't lie in a wind like this. No, the only thing to do is to wait for daylight, foller his tracks and then we'll get him and cut his tattling little throat.

"Aye, it's hard to talk with a slit windpipe. Maybe that would fix Dutch."

After a muttered colloquy, the men below the tree dispersed, taking themselves and their glimmering lanterns off in the direction of the beach where they evidently intended to salvage the jetsam of the hapless *Indian Queen*.

Hardly had the last of their footsteps become lost amid the dull thunder of the waves, than Roger Lincoln's strength deserted him and he sagged listlessly from his perch, to tumble downwards a good ten feet into an unconsciousness that was even blacker than the Stygian skies and the shadow-ruled forest.

Chapter IV

TO Roger Lincoln it seemed that he whirled on and on through a dark, limitless and intangible world, but even so, a subconscious instinct inherited from the remote ancestors of the human race, was at work in his mind.

Though he could not consciously hear, smell or see, nevertheless, he was acutely aware of an alien and a dangerous presence, so, painfully, like an overloaded beast of burden, his mind commenced to struggle back towards consciousness.

He found it required a tremendous effort to push aside those close hanging black clouds of unconsciousness, and it was curious how distinctly he could see himself, a small, bright figure, hewing away at the lowering shadows. Yes, something was near—not far from his head—he could hear a cautious, advancing tread of some animal. He wished he could cry out or move, but that seemed to be impossible; he could only lie there.

Now that his ears had begun to function, he could hear a twig snap and a low snuffling. Why couldn't he open his eyes and see what the animal was? Wolves, panthers, bears and wild cats abounded throughout Michigan—or so he had been told.

An icy, panic-stricken fear commenced to grip him when he realized he could not defend himself should the beast decide to attack him.

Closer drew the animal and now its snuffling foul breath was beating hot in his face. Still his limbs refused to respond. But when there sounded the snarl of ripping cloth and there shot into his left leg a searing pain, the shock abruptly restored him to full consciousness. He struggled up with a weak cry that made his unseen attacker leap back and retreat a little distance.

As Lincoln sought to steady the reeling world about him, he heard the sound of other footsteps behind him, and more to the right. Then all at once his eyes cleared and he beheld, hungrily eying him, a large brown and black beast resembling a wild boar. A Tamworth hog! He laughed weakly, hysterically. This anti-climax to his fear was so ridiculous.

But, to his amazement, when he waved his hand the big brown and black Tamworth did not retreat, and only clattered its evil yellow tushes and stood still.

"Git!" he called and felt in nowise

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cheered that the boar, as he stood there half concealed by the branches of the fir from which he had fallen, seemed very large and quite unafraid.

Abruptly serious, he peered painfully about. Off to the right and half hidden among the fir boughs stood another boar and an enormous sow. They also were studying him with a distinctly speculative air. There were others, too.

THEN a gruesome fear gripped the crippled sea captain when he recalled that pigs are naturally omnivorous. One by one there returned to him hideous stories of small children, drunkards and badly wounded men that had been terribly ripped, then devoured by common barnyard pigs, not half as big as these boar-like Tamworths.

"They're looking to see how badly hurt I am," thought Lincoln. "Guess, I'd better try to get up—they'll go away then."

But even as the thought became crystallized, the big boar came walking towards him, stiff legged and with tail held stiffly straight in the air.

"Get out," croaked Lincoln and reeled at the same time, for a stabbing, rending pain shot through his left side. "Must have broken a couple of ribs," he decided.

The pig retreated a pace at his cry, but the rest of the watchful circle stood fast while the half-naked sea captain tottered to his feet to cling weakly to the clean white trunk of a birch.

"Better get away from the beach." The thought formulated itself. "The sun will be up soon and the wreckers will be coming back. Damn these hogs—they know I'm crippled—can't get away."

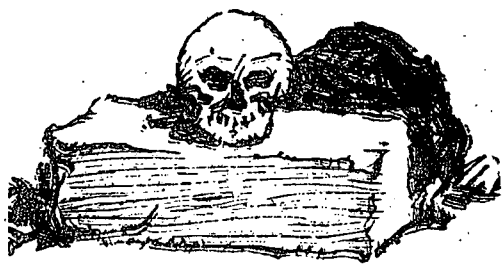
Choosing the line of least resistance, Lincoln set off at a gait so haltingly and painful, that the roving hogs followed, pausing occasionally to root at some promising bit of earth, but always keeping their pale brown eyes murderously intent upon him.

A devastating weakness came upon the battered, semi-conscious sea captain after he had limped along some ten minutes over an earth that performed peculiar sideslips and heavings.

"Mustn't fall," he kept telling himself. "Mustn't faint—those damn pigs—"

Unhurried, but ever-present, the circle of porcine pursuers kept after him, and that big boar stayed exactly twenty feet behind—occasionally clattering his curving yellow tushes, waiting, waiting.

"Never touch another piece—pork—long as I live," thought Lincoln and laughed at a wild vision of himself firmly refusing pork pie at some elaborate dinner.



Death he had faced many times and in many forms—the knives of drunken roughs, the pistols of defiant seamen, the crooked daggers of the Chinese and the terrible, razor-edged yataghans of the East Indies pirates—yet he had never had his soul quailed as it did under the steady regard of those lean Tamworths.

What a horrible end for the master of the *Flying Star*. Revolted, he managed to keep his feet a little longer; but fell at last, whereupon that huge boar came trotting up and only clattered his ivory-white tushes defiantly when Lincoln, with a weak, hysterical gesture, waved him back.

The world was an unreal nightmare, Lincoln felt, and even the slightest branch in his way seemed like an iron barrier when he struggled up to resume his pitiful and futile flight.

Poor Arad Lincoln. Whatever was the old man's fate, he would have to meet it now; and if Chloë were living, she, too, was doomed. Too bad; he had tried, but

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that stabbing pain in his side seemed to rob him of breath. He could not last much longer, that was sure. The ground kept sliding from under his feet and dew-wetted leaves slapped his eyes.

HE FELL again and three of the largest boars commenced to close in. He got up, prompted by the fact that the sun was beating more brightly ahead. A clearing of some kind—perhaps only a natural bare spot, but he would try to get there though his legs wavered like reeds and a cold, bitter sweat was dripping into his glazed and bloodshot eyes.

He fell again with a jar that caused his wounded side exquisite agony, and though he was not twenty feet from the clearing, this time could not muster enough energy to rise. However, driven by the instinct of self-preservation, he crawled on hands and knees until he beheld ahead long parallel furrows of red-brown earth.

The hogs were right alongside now, grunting in anticipation. One of them darted in, slashed at Lincoln's thigh and tore the blue serge cloth.

"Back," panted the wounded man weakly. "Get back—"

At the edge of the plowed ground the last of the sea captain's strength deserted him and he lay panting, but conscious that at the far end of the field a man was plowing behind a single white horse. Would that man look his way? It made no difference whether he was a wrecker or not, further flight was impossible.

There he lay, helpless on the dew soaked ground; his wounded leg bleeding from the gash inflicted by the big boar.

The foremost pig was almost upon him when he heard a startled shout and beheld a gray bearded man, with soil-marked gray trousers stuffed into heavy boot tops. He was running and waving his arms as he came.

"Get out'en thar."

A moment later Lincoln felt himself turned on his back, and, gazing down at him from a world that was misty with pain, stared a pair of the sharpest and most puzzled gray eyes he had ever beheld.

"What are ye doing here? Are you Mormon or Gentile?" Fierce questioning was in the gray haired man's craggy features.

"Side hurts," was all Lincoln could gasp before he relapsed into unconsciousness.

(*To be concluded in next* SHORT STORIES)

In the next issue

CASSIDY'S KID

A RAILROAD YARN

by

CHARLES W. TYLER

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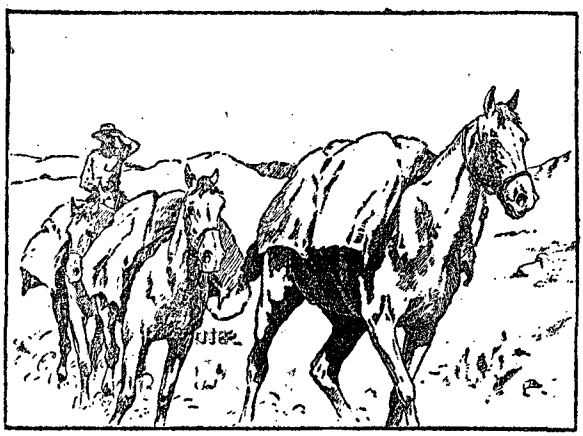
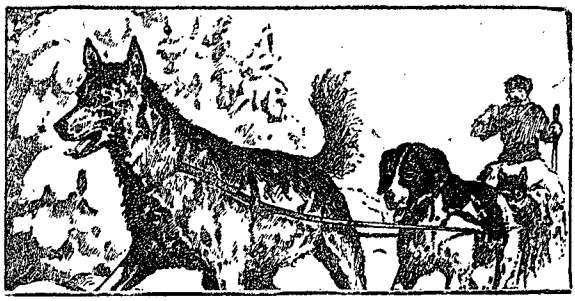
THE WEST
WHEN IT WAS YOUNG
by Elwell—First Link Tying East and West, I

The first recorded effort to connect California with East was a curiously mixed affair. Carrying of passengers was little considered. Reason for the effort being, U. S. government feared California in its isolation would set up republic of its own. If this state and vast area adjoining could be ever so slightly tied to East by communication it was thought that the inhabitants would remain loyal. Eastern born folks predominated, with attachment for the East. Despite irregular methods of communication, unbelievable valuables were carried.



Pony pack carried the express, gold and mail from San Francisco to the mountain passes, where it was delivered—



to dog sleds, that topped the deep snow passes to east side of ranges. At times snow was too powdery for dog travel, then

strong men made the trip on ski, where—

it continued Eastward on burro back. Nature at times disrupted the service by cruelly drying up the water holes—

or inhuman bandits, not satisfied with loot, tortured the brave men that fought to save their treasure.

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A SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES BY H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE TWO CAPTAINS

The Fate of the Franklin Expedition—One of the Secrets of the Frozen North

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"A FAIRLY well-known man can't disappear, back here in civilization, without starting a hue and cry all over the world," said Federn. "Or without leaving some trace. But in the jungle, or up in the Arctic, a dozen or fifty or a hundred men can vanish and never leave a sign."

"I beg your pardon," Macomb intervened gently. "That just isn't so. Federn. And I think I ought to know."

Just the three of us, old friends, dining together at Macomb's New Rochelle home to celebrate his return home from the outlands.

Yes, Macomb ought to know; none better. He was just back from two years in the frozen North. He had spent half his life in Greenland or farther under the Circle. He had been places up there no other white man had ever seen. Why, just this last trip, he and Poole had been lost for eight months, absolutely lost to sight and sound; yet they had survived, and Macomb looked none the worse for his frightful privations.

"No," he went on, "the Arctic is the last place anyone can disappear, Federn, and leave no trace. Man is so rare up there, his traces are so few, that they're not passed by easily. I don't think you can name anyone who has utterly vanished, in the Arctic, without leaving a trace. That is, within the past hundred years or so."

"Sir John Franklin!" I put in swiftly. Federn smiled. Macomb held a match to his pipe, and the flame brought out a cruel, savage glint in his eyes; he laughed softly.

"No. Franklin, his two ships, his crews, vanished utterly, in 1845. None of them were ever seen again, except two skeletons. The world hunted them for years—why, only last year I was trying to trace the route of the last survivers! Yet their fate is no mystery. Relics of them were found among the Eskimo; their charts, their diaries, were located. We know when Franklin died, and what happened to his men—"

Macomb checked himself abruptly. Federn leaned forward, and spoke.

"Up until April 25, 1848, yes. After that, no! You know the story, Macomb; check me if I'm wrong. On April 22nd, Captains Crozier of the *Terror*, and Fitzjames, of the *Erebus*, abandoned the two ice-nipped ships, with what remained of the men. Three days later they built a cairn of stones on Point Victory. In later days this cairn was discovered and opened; the chart was found bearing notes signed by the two captains, and a further notation by Crozier; it stated they were leaving on the morrow for the Fish River. They were hoping to reach a Hudson's Bay post, that way. Right?"

Macomb nodded assent. "Right. I've seen that very chart, in London."

"And nothing further was ever heard of those two captains and the forty men with them," said Federn. "A couple of skeletons and the remains of a boat were found; not identified, of course. Eskimo yarns were picked up, only to be disproved. Those two captains simply vanished, somewhere in King William's Land; vanished as though they'd disappeared into thin air, leaving no trace whatever."

"So you think," said Macomb, biting hard on his pipe. Again I caught the odd glitter in his deepset eyes.

"Nonsense!" Federn exclaimed impatiently. "My dear fellow, I happen to know! That's one of the standing mysteries of the world."

"It *was*," Macomb said laconically. Federn stared hard at him.

"What? D'you mean to say—look here, did you pick up some traces of them?"

Macomb chewed his pipe and looked at the two of us for a moment in silence. Then he spoke as though he had not heard the question.

"Do you know Poole? You know of him, anyhow."

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We did. Poole was a huge, blond-bearded giant of a man, as much at home in the Arctic as Macomb, almost equally famous as an explorer. We had expected to meet Poole here tonight, in fact, but something had kept him away at the last moment. A vigorous, merry, brainy Hercules; quite in contrast to Macomb, who was rather short but tremendously wide-shouldered and powerful, a bundle of nerves aflame with kinetic energy.

"I took some moving pictures up there," Macomb went on slowly, picking his words. "When we were lost, you know, we had a sledge and quite a bit of equipment. This movie camera was a tiny thing; even with the film it weighed little. So I happened to get out with it intact. I'll run the pictures for you, if you like."

"Why?" said Federn bluntly, probing for the unsaid words.

Macomb shrugged and rose. "There are things one can't talk about, old chap. I don't mind showing you two the pictures; you're friends, you'll understand. But I warn you, they're scrappy sort of pictures. You'll have to translate 'em for yourselves into a coherent narrative. Sit here while I rig up the thing and put a screen in place."

HE BUSIED himself, while we lit fresh cigars and waited, rather uneasily. Something in his manner was ominous. What all this had to do with the lost captains of the *Erebus* and the *Terror,* we could not conceive. Somehow, it held a faintly sinister touch, like that glint of ferocity in his eyes. Once up in the world of ice, it was not hard to imagine Macomb as a furious driving power of savage intensity.

When he had set up his projector and hung a screen on the wall, Macomb switched off the lights and the machine began to splutter as he adjusted it.

"These fragmentary pictures," he said, "pick up what happened after Poole and I struck off with a sledge to follow the route of Captains Crozier and Fitzjames —or their route as I approximated it. That's when we got lost to the world, you know. We started about the same time, in April; at that time, the land is snow-covered. The first shot shows us as we started. The next one comes months later, after the worst had happened. You'll find the transition rather sudden, but make the best of it."

The screen-lights flared and then settled into a picture. It was Poole, gigantic in his furs, enormously bearded, laughing widely. Beside him the sledge, loaded, and the dog team. Then a flicker, and we saw Macomb—not clean-shaven and chiseled of feature as now, but darkly bearded, serious, savagely intent.

Now came the transition two months later, and a Poole we scarcely recognized, so wasted and shrunken was his face, so hollow his eyes. Snow was falling. The brief Arctic summer had come and gone again, winter was back. Here and there were gray gaunt shapes of rock against the snowy background.

As though compelled by these scenes, Macomb began to speak. He explained things. The fragmentary life on the screen took shape and form. His voice summoned up, as by magic, what had taken place there under the Circle. Poole, his amiability all gone, was snarling like a wolf-hound, and Macomb snarled back at him.

"You're mad! You've lost your senses!" cried the gaunt and wasted Poole. "The cartridges are running low. We've lived a week on one rabbit; it's the seventh year, when the rabbits die off like flies, and we've hardly found any. My foot's healed, and I can travel, but I'm damned if I'll travel on this mad trail! If anything, we go back."

"That's impossible; no dogs, nothing but the sledge, everything gone," snapped Macomb. "I know we're on the right track. Before I turned back to camp. I saw what looked like a cairn of stones. I'm off to

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find it, now. I'll stake my life we're on Crozier's trail at last!"

"Damn you, stake your own, but not mine!" Poole limped toward him. For a moment, the two men stood face to face like animals about to leap. Then Macomb stepped back and picked up his rifle. Poole started, emitted an oath.

"It's come to that, has it? You'd shoot me?"

"No," said Macomb, more calmly. "I'll gamble with you. If that cairn isn't any such thing, I'll give up the attempt. You can take over the command. However, I did see the tracks of a fox. If I can find him, we'll eat."

He turned and slogged away abruptly. Poole ripped out an oath, shook his fist in the air, and hobbled back to their grim little camp. Hatred blazed in his sunken eyes; the slow, deliberate hatred that had grown day by day between the two of them. Not the quick flame of passion, but the gradual eating sear like an ember in the mind.

Mutual confidence and reliance had ebbed, these latter weeks. Everything had gone amiss, and each man blamed the other, without reason. Men worn to the quick with slow starvation, know no reason.

Men struggling against sickness, a blank wilderness, certain disaster, hurts, loneliness, find queer fuel to feed the embers of suspicion.

Poole staggered to the sheltered spot and dropped beside the upturned sledge. They had been here three weeks, waiting for his half-crushed foot to heal. He groped for the other rifle, found it, groped for the cartridges. None left; Macomb had taken them all. A laugh shook him, as he got out the one he had hidden next his skin. He bared the rifle, slipped in the cartridge, covered the steel again, and dragged himself into the sleeping bag, the weapon next him.

"He means to kill me; I saw it in his eyes!" he muttered. "If I was out of the way, he'd go on alone. He'd have food then, damn him—plenty of it! But I'll cheat him yet, one bullet's enough for that. He means to circle around and come on me while I'm asleep, does he? Then I'll not sleep, damn the rat!"

MACOMB, himself at a gasping stagger, plodded on in search of the fox-tracks he had seen, the cairn he had glimpsed. The snow promised to cover both very soon, but it was luckily thinning fast. No need of the snowshoes as yet, for this valley was swept by an eternal wind that had kept the ice of the stream clear.

The Fish River? Impossible to say. After incredible sufferings, they had struck it a month ago; then a rock had crushed Poole's foot and they stayed put, waiting. If it really were the Fish, if they could get out before the heavy snows closed down, they had a chance to make the Hudson's Bay post somewhere ahead. Exactly the same hope, the same chance, that Fitzjames and Crozier must have had; but those two had never reached the post. And thus far, Macomb had met no sign of them.

"The fool thought I meant to shoot him!" he muttered as he swayed along, peering at the snow and the scattered rocks and the ice, wiping his eyes clear of frost-rime to peer again. His beard was festooned with frozen breath; he looked scarcely human, with his shrunken, wasted features.

"It was in his mind to kill me; that's why he was scared. Good thing I took all the cartridges," went on his soliloquy, half thought, half mutter. "The winter frost is coming in now; another week or two, and we're done for, with the big snows. We can't haul the sledge any farther, even on the ice; we must take packs, yet we're too damned weak. No, try the sledge for one last spurt. God, if we only had one good meal!"

So the temptation came to him. A

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temptation which, to his mind, was very logical and no whit wrong.

He could travel much faster than Poole, with that foot still bad. Why not strike out and leave the other, then? If this were the Fish, as he believed, his chance of reaching the Hudson's Bay people and sending back help for Poole were excellent. Poole swore that this was not the Fish, but some other unknown stream. Their compass and other instruments had gone through a hole in the ice, about the time they ate the last dog; still, Macomb was convinced he was right. Poole was equally convinced the other way.

Each had cursed the other. A dozen times they had nearly come to blows; thrice they had turned their backs on each other and started away, only to realize their folly and join up again. But this three weeks of idle starving had been hard to endure. And now Poole meant to kill him! Macomb muttered fresh curses at the thought.

His strength was flagging. He sank down wearily beside a little pile of rocks and waited, immobile, despairing, lost in bitter thoughts. The light snow had ceased; the wind was blowing clear again. Head drooping, leaning on his skin-cased rifle, Macomb almost sank into the lethargy that would have but one end. He must have remained there a long time, for a white streak moving against the rocks and snow roused him to an incredible sight. Two foxes there, circling, unconscious of his presence. They were upwind, too.

Macomb flashed full awake. His fingers crept stealthily, inch by inch, with the first overt motion, they would be off. And so they were; but when he flung up the bared rifle, when the two shots smashed out upon the endless silence, a wild sweep of exultant joy swept through him. He cased the weapon again and dropped it, and croaked out a hoarse yell of triumph. Shaking his arms in the air, he staggered stiffly out to retrieve the two little creatures that meant life to him and Poole—life, strength to carry on, the first round meal in long weeks!

HE PICKED them up, stiffly frozen before he reached them, and could barely refrain from plunging his teeth through that soft white fur to seek the warm blood under the frozen wound. Turning, he went back to where he had left the rifle. He came to a halt, staring at the little pile of rocks. A pile of rocks! The very thing he had been seeking and dreaming of all these months! Was it possible?

He held back no longer, but put his knife into one of the little animals and his teeth to the wound. The blood, still warm, went through his veins and body with a surge of life and strength. He flung himself at the little pyramid of rocks, loosened the top stones with his rifle-butt, tore them aside.

In the heart of the cairn, thus protected from animals, he found a round tin box, sealed. Nothing else. He cut the shrunken leather that had sealed the tin, in a wild frenzy of hope and expectation; then all his exultation died. Paper, nothing else; a roll of written sheets wrapped in hide hard as iron. He did not so much as glance at them, but stuffed them under his parka and turned to his rifle.

Crozier? Fitzjames? Nothing mattered now except food. Time enough later for all that. Hunger spurred the brain madly. That fox-blood had given him new life, and he struck out on the back trail joyously. But, as he neared camp, he slowed.

After all—two little foxes! They would not mean much. Why not leave one for Poole, with a few cartridges, and himself make a spurt while he could? That would be best for Poole, best for himself. Poole, if normal, would agree to it instantly. But Poole was off balance now, and had murder in his eyes.

Macomb halted completely and stood, leaning on his rifle. Then he slowly shook

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his head; that drink of warm blood saved the day. It had momentarily restored him to his senses. All the same, he was afraid of Poole, and that murder-look in the eyes that no longer laughed. This fear lingered with him.

As for Poole, that man had never closed his eyes, but lay waiting. He heard the distant shots; it meant two of the precious cartridges gone, nothing more. He could not visualize success, or possible food; he could only feed his burning hatred for this stocky, powerful man who had done everything wrong, and who was leading them both into death. And now Macomb was coming back to kill him and go on alone.

This conviction gave the spark to sheer insanity. Poole left his sleeping-bag and crouched with his rifle ready. He could see Macomb coming, a long way off. He watched the sturdy figure plodding forward, and threw out his rifle, fondling it. His blue eyes were ablaze with madness; the fixed idea that Macomb intended to kill and eat him was burning in every atom of his brain.

Poole was a dead shot. When he pressed the trigger, he had a bead on Macomb's heart.

The clanging crash of the rifle echoed dully along the little valley. Macomb stopped short and then toppled under the impact of the bullet. He twisted about and lay quiet, face down.

"There, you damned snown-burner!" croaked Poole. "Now you won't sneak up on me and clap a bullet into me!"

He fell to work swiftly. There was nothing but the sleeping-bag that he must carry, for they had nothing. The sledge held a small pack—the little movie camera and the records of their work. Macomb had clung to these with savage persistence, but Poole turned his back on them gladly. His one idea now was to get away from here now.

He limped out to where Macomb lay. Sight of that still figure close at hand, of the flurry of fresh blood on the snow, made him realize what he had done; he uttered a hoarse, thick cry, then stooped and felt for the pocket where Macomb carried the cartridges. His fingers found them. He gripped them and rose, and fled—unaware of the two white foxes that lay hidden beneath Macomb's body.

His flight was as mad as his other impulses—a wild, blind, senseless course away from there. He wanted to get out of this accursed valley. He was positive this was not the Fish River; his fixed idea that Macomb was entirely wrong, now drove him. Oddly enough, however, the natural instinct of his experienced explorer's brain led him to take the quickest and best way out of this valley. It was sheer instinct, for he was fevered and really insane.

Not that he could go very far or long. In his frightfully emaciated condition, the weight of furs, rifle and sleeping-bag made a terrific burden; besides, his half-healed foot would not endure much travel.

AFTER an hour, he began to flag, his limping stride getting slower and slower. Fever was upon him now, full force; while this curative fever lent him strange fancies and visions, it was also burning out the ills of his brain. Thus, pitifully, he was dimly and vaguely aware of his own frightful condition and what he had done.

His trail out of the valley led between two hills. The snow was deep here, the going was impossible; he skirted one of the hills that lifted in a sharp rock-face above him. He was floundering along, at the last gasp, when to his joy he discerned a tremendous fall of rock just ahead. An overhang of the cliff had fallen, and quite recently, because it had come down in a mass over the new snow and lay in a jumble of earth and rock along the side of the hill.

His staggering steps came to a bewildered halt at sight of something white

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protruding from the earth. A bone. Laboriously, he stooped and picked it up. A burst of horrible laughter came to his cracked lips as some untouched brain-cell reacted; he knew it for a human thigh bone, cracked and broken by animal teeth.

Another laugh, and he flung it away and started on. Something glittered. Here amid the rocks lay queer symmetrical things; tins, a small wooden keg, more tins. Poole stood blinking and swaying, then his fever-bright eyes widened. He dropped in a huddle and began to claw at the objects. His knife came out and he jabbed into the tins. The odor of food filled his nostrils and maddened him. Biscuit, hard as iron, but biscuit! And in the little keg, brandy. With his maniacal strength, he smashed the keg with a rock and lapped at the fiery stuff.

He looked up to see the ghost of Macomb approaching.

It was, to Poole, a horrible moment; he had just enough sense to appreciate how horrible it was. He groped for his rifle and could not find it. Macomb, sure enough, one arm stiff, with frozen blood over the mitten. And about Macomb's neck were slung two little white foxes.

"Get away!" Poole came to his feet in gusty fear. "You're dead! Keep away from me!"

Macomb halted and laughed a little, but faintly.

"Not a bit of it," came his voice. "Look here!" From beneath his parka, he tugged out a packet wrapped in hide, hard as iron, and opened it to disclose a roll of papers. "This stopped your bullet. It did tear up my arm a bit; I've lost enough blood to make me groggy. But I came along with these two foxes—hello! What have you stumbled on?"

"Get away!" Poole advanced on him fiercely, understanding nothing of all this talk, maddened by the ghost who smiled and spoke. "Get out! You're dead—go away and leave me alone, damn you!"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Macomb, dropping the stiff little foxes. "I tell you—"

POOLE uttered a wild scream and flew at him. The two men grappled. Their weakened legs gave way, and they went rolling, cursing and struggling frantically. Macomb got his hands under that yellow beard and sank his fingers into Poole's throat, desperately striving to make the man understand that everything was all right.

But Poole's hand clutched at a rock. Macomb saw the blow coming, tried vainly to evade it—and everything ended for him with the crash and the shower of sparks across his brain.

When he came to himself again, it was like wakening in heaven. He lay in Poole's sleeping-bag, in a hollow among the rocks, the cold wind sweeping and whining overhead among the stars. A tiny fire was blazing; the smell of food was upon him. Poole was holding up his head, pouring warm tea into him. Tea!

Macomb lay back again, looking for more miracles and finding them. Poole, with little use of his bad leg, dragged himself about briskly. The fire itself was a miracle in this woodless land; Macomb saw that it was the usual moss, mingled with bits of wood from a keg. He found tongue at last.

"Hello! What's happened?"

Poole gave him a look. "Awake, eh? I don't know what's happened; still out of my head, I guess. This grub was uncovered by a fall of rock, apparently. There's tobacco, too. I'll have this fox stew ready in a minute; sit tight. Your arm's in bad shape, but I'll take care of it."

After this, they hardly talked at all. Too much lay between them; too many terrible things. Macomb was too weak to move; his arm, torn by the bullet, was an intolerable pain. His head hurt, too, where that rock had bashed him.

Now came the stew; the stringly tough meat seemed delicious, the broth and the

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biscuits soaked in it proved all the miracles true. Macomb fell asleep with Poole at work on his hurt arm.

He slept a long time, and then wakened to sanity, more food, and their first whiff of tobacco in months. At one side, Poole had stored a mass of tins and packages recovered from the earth. The two men began to talk, awkwardly, conscious of the recent horror. Macomb told of the foxes and the cairn, and what he had found in it. He asked where the roll of papers were. Poole growled, and took a rock from a pile of paper scraps.

"That's what's left. Some blew away. I used some for the fire."

Macomb caught his breath. "Oh, you fool—you damned fool! They must have been records left by Crozier and Fitzjames! Priceless things, diaries, things the world would give anything to obtain!"

Poole looked at him, and nodded.

"I know it, Mac. Go on and curse all you please. The papers were scattered about in our fight. I was out of my head. Oh, there's no excuse! I know you'll hate me for it, but that can't be helped. Later, when I came around a bit, I gathered up what was left."

Macomb tried to speak, but found it impossible. He could not forgive Poole for this act; fury rose in him at the very thought. They had toiled and suffered and planned for just such a find—and Poole had flung it away.

Not entirely, however. Between them, they began to read the scraps that remained. Personal animosity became forgotten in this new interest. That the papers were a record left by the two captains, was now certain.

"Good God, Poole, listen to this!" cried out Macomb. He had been reading one of the longer entries. Now, holding it in the fingers of his good hand as he sat up, he read the fragment aloud.

> "—all track of time lost. Must be two months since the last man died. Plenty of food now for the two of us. C. still very ill. Have been here about three weeks. Out of his head much of the time; poor fellow, I had to use force to subdue him more than once. If he recovers, I shan't admit it to him. It would wound him to the soul. I never knew a man could be so noble, so—"

That was all. Macomb's eyes lit up.

"Fitzjames wrote this, Poole! You see? The two captains were alone; no one else was left. They were here, on this very Fish River.

"How do you know Fitzjames wrote it?" Poole demanded.

"It's his writing. I told you I saw that chart, in London. Some of these scraps are in Crozier's hand."

"Read this one," said Poole grimly. "Looks like I was right about the river.

Macomb obeyed. Here was nearly a full sheet, evidently it was written by Crozier.

> "F. apparently right. This is not the Fish; it takes us in the wrong direction. We argued bitterly about it; once, heaven forgive me, we nearly came to blows. F. has been magnificent. Nursed me all through the affair; tender as a woman. Refused to leave me and press on. His hand is badly infected; I shall have to operate tomorrow. He has a high fever—"

"So this isn't the Fish after all!" Macomb looked up. "Then you were right about the river trending too far north. Apparently they had the same argument, too. Odd!"

OTHER scraps of writing turned up. All of them, except the most important, were mere fragments:

> "The swelling is leaving my arm. C. is on his feet now. I feel he is wrong about our course; but he is in com-

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mand. We may encounter Esquimeaux; this is our hope, because—"

"F. is a noble fellow. I should be dead except for him. God bless him and get him alive out of this! A sad reflection that now we do not know what to do with the food. We cannot carry—"

Macomb could not read these fragments without a swelling of the heart. He turned to the longest and most important of all. This was in the hand of Crozier, and it gave the explanation of the miracle that had happened nearly ninety years later.

"We shall depart in two days, for the south. F. has found an excellent spot between two hills where we may cache everything we cannot carry; we may need to return to it. An overhang of a cliff, with a wide ledge that will hold all we leave. We shall get the sled over there tomorrow. Both of us very fit now, thank God. The place seems a bit dangerous, constant falls of rock occurring, but all quite small. Due to the spring thaws, no doubt. Everything will be more accessible there if we should return, than if we built another cairn here—"

Macomb looked up. "Poole! What was that you said about finding a thigh bone? Are you quite certain about it? Where is it?"

Poole shook his head, and pawed his big yellow beard.

"I can't find it, Mac; I was looking just now. I threw it away, like the fool I am. Yes, I'm certaain. The human femur is distinctive, you know. No manner of doubt about it; some animal had chewed it a bit."

"Then, you know what that means?" Macomb tapped the paper in his hand. "While they were putting this stuff on the ledge mentioned here, the two of them were caught in a fall of rock! Finding that bone makes it certain. Where are you off to?"

Poole had risen. "I'm going to bring up the sledge and our other stuff. My foot's all right; I can do it. Besides," and he gave Macomb a queer look. "I want to think. See you later."

He went hobbling away, rifle over arm.

MACOMB, left alone here for some hours, did a lot of thinking himself. He searched in vain for any sign of that thigh-bone Poole had found; neither it nor any other bones turned up.

However, there could be no doubt whatever that his theory was correct. The two captains had been caught in some rock fall. And now, after all the years, a further and much greater fall had brought to sight their cache—and the one indication necessary to reveal their fate.

The loss of all those papers was bitter in the mind of Macomb, yet he could not bring himself to blame Poole for it. When he thought of the temptation that had clutched at him, and how nearly he had yielded to it, he went cold. This could not be the Fish River, after all. If he had struck off by himself, it would have meant disaster for him and for Poole too.

As he read over those fragments of writing again, a great sense of shame assailed him. Why, those two captains had experienced almost the identical reactions he and Poole had known! The same arguments, the same divided opinions; even their mishaps were not unlike.

And they, or what was left of them, lay somewhere beneath this mass of fallen rock and earth. At the very moment when they had struggled through the worst, when they had turned south, when they probably had success and life ahead, disaster had overtaken them. Why? Macomb looked up at the gray sky, and scowled.

"No finer men ever lived; why did that happen to them?" he muttered. "Was that justice? Not a damned bit of it. They

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believed in God, and this is what hit them. I don't believe in anything, and—"

He checked himself sharply, in a rush of wondering conjecture. How had he and Poole been led to this discovery, to this new life when the hand of death was upon them, except by some greater hand pointing the way?. It almost seemed as though the fate of those other two men had been prepared to save these two who came ninety years later—but that was too cold, too cruel, a thought. He shoved it away.

"I don't know, after all; maybe I do believe in something," he said slowly. "If they'd never been lost, I'd not have come looking for some sign of them. It's all too big a thing to grasp. The possibilities are too large, too vague. Damn it, we just can't savvy these things—"

Macomb turned away, and saw the figure of Poole coming back, dragging the sledge.

When they met, Poole straightened up and looked at him for a long moment, the blue eyes perplexed and hesitant.

"D'ye know, Mac, I've been thinking," he blurted out. "About what we were reading; what they wrote. I don't expect that two finer men ever lived on this earth."

Macomb started slightly. It was the very thought that had come to him, almost in the same words. He nodded assent. Poole went on.

"To read what happened to them, and how they took it—well, it makes me feel damned cheap and small, Mac. I just don't measure up to their class."

"You mean, we don't," said Macomb, and smiled a little.

"Nope; you're all right, but I'm not. I've made a fool of myself."

"It's mutual," said Macomb quietly. "Suppose we forget the whole thing, rest up for another day, and then strike through these hills to the south. After all, I guess this isn't the Fish River. And, as for everything else that's happened—let's not mention it again. Wipe off the slate."

He put out his hand, and Poole gripped it, with a choked word of assent.

The last picture of the screen ran into a blur of light. The chippety song of the projector died. Macomb flashed on the lights, and the three of us were there in our own world again.

MACOMB came back to the table, picked up a cigar, and lighted it. I watched his fingers, but they were quite steady. Federn drew a deep breath and, rather awkwardly, broke the silence that held us.

"So I was wrong. You did discover the last secret of the North. But I didn't see anything about it in the papers, or in your report of the expedition. What became of those papers, anyhow? Have you got 'em here?"

"No," said Macomb, puffing at his cigar. "No. You know, Federn, the story of what happened between Poole and me isn't anything to be reported; neither one of us would be very proud to have it known publicly. And if the scraps of those papers were brought to light, people would ask where the rest of 'em were; the whole yarn would have to come out. So—I burned the papers."

Federn stiffened, gripped the arm of his chair, leaned forward.

"Burned them! Burned them—to keep from telling the truth about Poole? Why, you damned fool!"

Macomb smiled a little and nodded again.

"Yes, I've thought that at times, myself; but I really know better. So do you."

Federn slowly relaxed. Yes, he knew better. After all, the nobility of mankind did not entirely perish with the two captains of Sir John Franklin.

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Hitch Hiking Plum to That Mine on Serena—But Always Take a Trailer to Bring Out the Gold.

DETOURED HITCH-HIKE

By HOWARD NOSTRAND

Author of "Slim Trails Along," "By a Dam Site," etc.

THE road cuts across a level to climb, and dip, and climb again. Westward, at the horizon's broken edge, lie mountains; but for the present there is no respite from sun glare and desert breath.

A shaft of gray rock points to the sky. Solitary, it towers a hundred feet above the plain; yet it is not impressive—erosion has fashioned a tongue-in-cheek figure for men to laugh at. Even the Forty-niners, fighting their way over the waste, grinned in spite of themselves and named it "The Sore Thumb."

It is scarred with initials, some scratched in, some penciled; all new-looking, although they belong to the days when wagon trains camped at its base; for the highway is two miles away now, and there is nothing in a ridiculous spire of stone to lure the tourist.

The sun was sinking fast, and it was early fall—no time for spending a night in that windswept place with only the one thin blanklet looped over his shoulder for covering. Behind him lay two hundred miles of desert, and in his pocket was a manila envelope bearing his name, Emmett Jackson. It contained eighteen dollars, his pay for one week of work as a field hand on a Utah farm.

He'd expected to reach the Coast in a day, but a number of hold-ups and a particularly vicious murder on the highway within the last week had made chances very slim for the ride-thumber. Even the man who had brought him to Prado that morning had seemed suspicious, although

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the only difference between him and Emmett was the possession of a four-wheeled wreck that wouldn't have brought twenty dollars as junk.

Pulling out a wrinkled road map, he held it bellying in the wind while he ran an eye down his route. From Prado to Grange City was twenty-five miles, and he'd been walking since noon. There seemed to be nothing ahead but more miles of purpling plain, yet somewhere not so far a town must lie.

Keeping on after nightfall was asking for trouble. The straight stretch of concrete called for speed, and he'd driven across deserts too many times himself—with his eyes glued on the white line—to put any faith in the ability of motorists to see beyond a pair of oncoming headlights.

Long since he'd stopped glancing over his shoulders hopefully when he heard the whine of a motor; but finally one slowed, and he faced about. It was a refrigerator truck with "No Riders" painted on the windshield.

"Goin' to Grange, buddy?" called the driver.

"Yeah."

"Hop in."

After a time the man said. "When we get near the town yuh kin get off—see? It'd be worth my job if yuh was spotted ridin' with me; but I hate like hell to see a guy driftin' along these stretches on foot, an' it don't cost nothin' to give a lift."

"Workin' out of Salt Lake?"

"Yeah—left there at three this afternoon. I'm layin' over tonight in Grange an' pullin' back empty tomorrow. I got a week's meat supply for the whole town on board—makes me laugh to think if I didn't show up they'd hafta live on beans."

HE WAS about twenty-three or four —Emmett's age—and slight of build, almost puny in comparison with the burly hiker.

Three o'clock," said Emmett softly. "It's taken me since noon to get from Prado."

"Yuh musta walked the whole way."

"Yeah—an' my feet know it."

"Where yuh headin'?"

"California. I figured on bein' there tonight. Left Packer's Farm—that's about ten miles outa Salt Lake—yesterday. I been knockin' around up there all summer, but things been pretty dull, so I decided on goin' back to L.A. Got a brother managin' a couple fishin' barges. He wrote me he could use me runnin' passengers out on a speed-boat. I'll try thumbin' again tomorrow, only if I don't get a lift pretty quick I'm gonna grab a bus. I'd sooner knock a hole in the old bank-roll than wear my legs off up to the knees."

The road swung west on a long curve around a lava ridge, and as it straightened out they spied the town, a cardboard village laid out on a sanded table.

"A gas station at this end o' the place," said the driver. "Drop off there. Keep on for six blocks to the Grange City Club. Best meals yuh kin get, an' they'll put yuh up for the night. Don't cost more'n a buck, includin' breakfast."

When Emmett walked into the place, a game was in progress—roulette, from the sound; he couldn't tell because of the crowd. Two or three men were leaning against the bar at the other side; and in the rear behind a long counter a nickel-plated urn was steaming merrily. The aroma of coffee penetrated the smoke-filled air, and it suddenly became very important that he climb up on one of the stools and order food.

Except for his legs he did not feel tired, and yet he dozed over the meal. He was walking, walking past towering hills impossibly red, and green, and blue, when the bartender said, "Stayin' over, Bud?"

"Yeah."

"Guess you'd like to turn in."

"Guess I would."

"O.K. We'll fix up a place in a few

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minutes. Make yourself at home while you're waitin'." He motioned toward a leather chair against the wall near the roulette wheel.

In its comfortable embrace sleep came again.

A hazy impression wove itself into the pattern of his dream:

"I'm through," said a voice. "Yuh hooked me for ten bucks last week, an' yuh figgered on lettin' me win one pot before trimmin' me again tonight. But I ain't havin' any more. We're even—an' we're quits."

"Says you!"

Chairs moved back. Emmett opened his eyes. Everybody was watching a group at a green-topped table in the center under a shaded lamp. Two men were seated, looking up at two more who were glaring at one another. In front of them lay scattered cards.

"We don't do any chiselin' aroun' here," said the taller, a broad shouldered individual in a black alpaca coat. "If you hadn't made that crack you could of walked out of here without any trouble; now you can play another hand—not because we're afraid to lose ten dollars, but just to show everybody what a lousy poker player you are."

"Nuts," said the other. He jingled the silver in his pocket. "I'm on my way, sweetheart."

It was the truck driver.

"Sit down, shrimp!" said the man in the black coat, reaching over and shoving him, pushing him in the face with open hand.

EMMETT was across the room in one jump. "One minute! My friend here says he's finished. And that means he's finished, see? And this," he went on, jabbing his fist at the other man's jaw, "is to remember it!"

Immediately he became very busy. Both the seated men sprang up and started swinging at him. Out from the kitchen came the bartender, a beer bottle in his hand.

Emmett had the feeling that he'd better get his back against the wall, and he began retreating, unable to do more than ward off flying fists.

The driver had picked up a chair, but some of the onlookers had grabbed him. He was struggling helplessly.

Emmett lashed out with both arms at once. His right landed with a solid thump on the chest of an attacker; the man staggered backward and stumbled over the body of the first one hit.

But the bartender was closing in, brandishing the bottle as he came.

Emmett got behind the leather chair and kicked it slithering across the floor—a lucky shot.

As the one nearest him jumped aside, the bartender got it in the middle and doubled over.

It was only a second's respite, but it gave him a chance to dash out. The driver followed.

"They lemme go," he panted. "Le's scram."

"Where to?"

"Some place else. C'mon," he insisted as the big man held back. "They'll shove yuh in the calaboose an' throw the key away. If I could use the truck I'd jump to the next town with yuh, but it's bein' unloaded down at the cold storage plant."

"How about you?"

"Forget it. I'm known here, an' that bird I told off is a gyp—everybody's wise to him. Yuh notice they didn't try to stop

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me. But you got your neck in a sling—not that I ain't grateful."

"Hell!" said Emmett, looking back. "Nobody's comin'."

"They will be. Yuh gotta get outa town."

The big man shrugged. "Guess I'll hike some more then, an' roll up on the desert."

"Tell yuh what," said the other, "you start. Soon's the truck's empty I'll shoot after yuh an' take yuh down to Vanguard."

"Well," said Emmett, "if it ain't too much trouble."

"Trouble hell!" said the little man. "Whose fault is it you're in the soup?"

At the side of the road a sign read, "Grange City, Unincorporated Area—Restricted Speed."

"O. K.," Emmett agreed. "I'll be on my way."

The driver grinned and headed back.

A CAR was coming. Its headlights skittered along the road surface, making the big man's shadow a crazy thing that elongated and shortened like a mammoth worm. He moved over, half expecting another fight.

It was a coupe with a trailer hitched behind. As it slowed, someone called, "Want a lift?"

"Well—" he hesitated.

"It's all right—we just finished talkin' to the little guy."

There were two men. "It'll be a tight squeeze," said Emmett.

" 'Sall right—slide in. We kin make it."

In the dim light from the dash, he could get no idea of them except that they weren't young.

"We saw that scrap," said the one in the middle. "Didn't waste no time gittin' inta the argument, didja?"

"You were in there?"

"Yeah. I says to my pardner here, ' 'C'mon, le's pick that feller up. We don't wanna hang around' this dump anyhow, an' it won't hurt to do a good turn.' "

"How'd yuh know I was walkin'?"

"Well, to tell the truth, we saw yuh this afternoon somewhere this side o' Prado, but we wasn't feelin' good natured then. Where yuh goin'?"

Emmett told his story.

"Your brother know you're comin'?"

"Nothin' definite. I answered his letter, an' I said I'd think it over. But when they paid me only eighteen bucks I got disgusted an' lit out."

"Then yuh ain't really in a hurry."

"Not once I'm clear of Grange. Why?"

"We got a proposition," said the man at the wheel. "I'm Jed Blacker, an' that buzzard alongside o' yuh is Sam Wright." He steered off the road and stopped the car. "Le's talk like human bein's 'steada sardines."

They climbed out and entered the trailer, a factory job with battleship linoleum on the floor, a sink in one corner with a gasoline stove beside it, cushioned seats, a radio on a shelf over the rear window.

"Boy!" Emmett exclaimed. "Some rig."

The one named Jed lit the stove and put on a coffee percolator. "Yeah, it's got it all over the ol' pack mule."

Both men were in their fifties. They might have been a couple of retired business men touring the country, to judge from the newness of their outfits. Sam was dressed in a leather zipper jacket, whipcord riding breeches and high laced boots. Jed wore a gray sweater—also with a zipper—dark blue flannel trousers, and heavy tan brogues.

They were of middle height, Sam a shade taller, but he carried himself with a slight stoop that leveled him to the stature of his partner. Their faces were the one incongruous note; for they had the mark of the desert upon them, that leathery tanned look of years spent under burning skies.

Sam unhooked what seemed to be a portion of the wall; it unfolded into a surprisingly serviceable table. "C'mon,

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young feller," he said, "take a load off your feet."

Emmett let himself down on the cushions gingerly, as if he were fearful that his weight might prove too much for mere collapsible equipment, but everything held.

"Jed an' me," went on the other, "have been travelin' aroun' for a good long time, an' we been cautious. We ain't no desert rats blowin' in every ounce o' dust on booze to wash down the taste o' alkali, so's we hafta go back broke an' find some more dust so's we kin buy more booze an'—"

"That kin go on all night," interposed Jed, winking at Emmett. He lowered the flame under the coffee as the water began to pop into the glass dome, and slid in beside his partner. "Sam'll talk the ear offa yuh if yuh give him a chance. We been so broke sometimes we had to beg for grubstakes, an' once not so long ago we give up prospectin' altogether to go huntin' ol bottles in ghost towns, because people thought it was stylish to have a couple of 'em on a mantelpiece—you know, all different colors from bein' lef' out in the open."

"Funny," remarked Sam. "Sellin' a dead sojer for more'n it was worth new."

"It woulda made us rich," Jed went on. "We had us a bottle mine—Sam knowin' exac'ly where to look—but it was jus' one o' them fads, an' it petered out. Well, we was up in Salt Lake one day, an' bemoanin' our fate, when I got hold of one o' them scientific magazines. It was an old one in a barber shop, but it told about some feller down in Central America findin' heaps o' gold that was buried in the old days. He was usin' some kind of a radio thing-a-ma-jig. So I forgot all about gettin' my whiskers trimmed, an' hunted up Sam. We found out that a company was makin' 'em to sell all the way from seventy-five dollars to a couple o' thousand, an' we ordered one. When it come, we went lookin'."

"The big companies use 'em for locatin' oil," said Emmett. "A guy was tellin' me."

"Yeah," Jed agreed, "an' where to look for water. Anything—like the ol' hazel fork brought up to date. Only we wasn't interested in water or oil, but we was interested in gold."

"Does it work on ore?"

"Sure—leastways, I guess so. We didn't fool aroun' much with it that way. Yuh see, there's a lotta places through here where stuff has been cached—from as far back as the days when this was all Spanish territory. Every once in a while somebody digs up some, but yuh don't get to hear nothin' about it, because them that finds keeps an' says nothin'. It might mean doin' some sharin'."

"Yuh kin tell, though," put in Sam. "Some sourdough that ain't even had chewin' tobacco he didn't borrow, all of a sudden gets all tricked out like it was Easter an' drinks himself to death tryin' to sluice away the alkali dust in his craw."

"Shut up, Sam," said Jed, and smiled across at the young man. "Let's have us some coffee."

"But where do I fit into the picture?" asked Emmett. "What's the proposition?"

"My idea," said Sam. "Prob'ly you been puttin' two an' two together a'ready—we found a cache."

"An' it's in a hell of a place," said Jed.

"We're willin' to put all our cards on the table," Sam went on. "We need help. It's up at an old mine on the east slope of Mount Serena at the head of the damndest canyon anybody ever tried to get into. It takes seven hours o' steady goin' to get there from where we hafta leave the car, an' almost as much to come down again. An' not only that, it's high country—there's snow only a couple hundred feet further up. It knocks the blazes outa your breathin'—Jed gets asthma or somethin'. He ain't worth a damn when it comes to packin', an' I told him I wasn't goin' to bring down no three hundred pounds by myself. Take me almost a week—if I didn't die doin' it."

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"LOTSA rattlesnakes," said Jed. "They come out on the trail—such as it is—an' dare yuh to come on."

"An' catamounts," said Sam, "with paws as big as your fists. I ain't never felt right about them animals ever since one clawed me up in Idaho oncet."

"Neither one of us is real mountain men," said Jed, "only we suspicioned there was pay dirt up there, an' so it proved."

Emmett shrugged. "I've heard of fellers bein' scared when a couple o' cut-ups got workin' on him, but I never been the goat before. Seems like you boys was havin' a little fun tonight."

"You're willin' to give us a hand, you mean?"

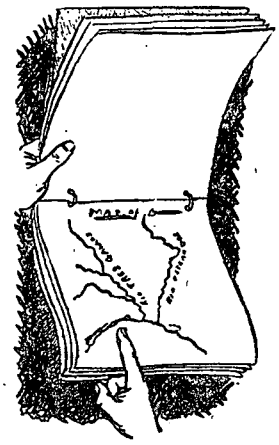
"Not yet a while. Not until you show me I'm not bein' taken for a sleigh ride. What's the matter with bringing the stuff out with a couple of burros? Why pick on a guy you never saw before? S'posin' I was a crook? There's a lot more cards that ain't in sight."

"Well," said Sam, pulling out a roll of bills and peeling off five, "here's a hundred dollars real money to show yuh we mean business. Shove them inta your pocket to keep from feelin' foolish, an' when the job's done we'll add four hundred more to keep 'em from feelin' lonesome."

"An' we kin answer all your questions," said Jed. "We don't crave a burro because we'd hafta buy one, an' it'd give some smart coyote ideas. We picked you out because you're husky, an' because yuh don't look like you'd go aroun' tellin' all yuh knew—an' anyway you'll do your tellin' in California, mos' likely. If we was to hire a local boy he'd have it spread all over the map in no time, an' like I said before, we might hafta do some sharin'. The property ain't been worked in God knows when, an' nothin' would be found if it was. What we come across was in cans—buried. Looks like placer stuff datin' back much further than the mine, but if we had to prove it, it'd take time an' money. So we're usin' our heads—an' givin' you a chance to make a few dollars. When it comes to your bein' a crook, you let us worry about that. We been livin' too close to trouble for a good many years not to keep an eye out for it. You ain't got guns, but we have; an' we know how to use 'em. If yuh wanta cash in on some luck, pick up them bills like my pardner told yuh."

EMMETT grinned as he slipped them into the envelope along with his Utah pay.

"Now," said Sam, "we're gonna drive some more. We're gonna get to where the trail starts before we turn in. It'll likely be two o'clock by then, an' you're gonna work tomorrow. If yuh wanta, yuh kin come on up with us agin, but it don't seem sensible. Right up until the las' half hour or so the road'll be smooth, an' this thing rides like a baby carriage—I even cook meals with Jed up front knockin' out



forty miles an hour.

"Yuh look like a snooze wouldn't hurt none—s'posin' yuh stretch out an' get some sleep."

They opened out a bunk. It was as comfortable a bed as he'd ever lain it; but even though the motion was soothing—after the few bumps at the very beginning

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when they were swinging back to the highway—he lay awake for some time.

That business about the burro didn't ring true. They could have bought one a thousand miles away and brought it along in the trailer. Furthermore, when he'd asked about the radio metal finder, Jed had managed to shy away from any discussion, had even admitted that he wasn't sure whether it would locate ore. All their answers had been too pat—like a staged performance.

He was about to get up and look through the closets to see whether he could get any information from the contents: shovels, picks—or better yet, the gold finders. But on second thought he decided against it. The trailer was as dark as an underground cave. If he lit the light, they'd see it from the coupe. For all he knew the current drain might show on the ammeter if he did no more than snap on the radio for the sake of the faint illumination the dial would give. Anyway, if they were up to something that spelled trouble for him, he'd know it sooner or later and act as the occasion demanded. At least things were starting nicely—a hundred dollars is nothing to be sneezed at.

He did not know when they reached the canyon. Sam had said that the road got bumpy, but he did not feel it; and the sun hitting his face through a side window was his alarm clock.

The partners were sound asleep in the rear bunk, an arrangement constructed of the seats, the table, and closet shelves. While he was wondering whether he should wake them, Jed broke a snore in the middle and sat up.

"Morning," said Emmett. "Shouldn't we be on our way?"

"No big hurry." Jed pulled a watch from under his pillow. "It's only eight o'clock. We'll wait for Sam to sleep himself out. We can't do nothin' till tomorrow. We talked it over after you was asleep. It's gonna take seven hours to get up there, an' its gotta be done in daylight. We kin leave about ten an' be up by five. That'll give you an' Sam a chance to rest good before startin' down. We figure if yuh leave at four tomorrow mornin' yuh should be here by eleven. You'll eat, start back at say twelve, an' be at the mine by seven or seven-thirty."

"Why is daylight so important? If it'd save a day, I wouldn't mind puttin' in a couple of hours after dark."

"Wait. Yuh don't know what it's like."

AFTER they were on their way, he had to agree. The trail clung to the wall of a narrow gorge through which a mountain cataract roared. Although they were continuously climbing, the distance from the water varied. Sometimes they crossed from one wall to the other over spray drenched rocks, or splashed along the muddy bank; sometimes they had to inch themselves along a foot wide ledge so far above the stream that distance hushed its voice to a murmur, and Emmett, unaccustomed to high places, dared not let his eyes swing down.

Even at a lower altitude it would have been a strain, but in the rarefied air it was torture. Sam seemed less affected than Emmett, but Jed, trailing far behind, was pathetic.

He had picked up a long stick at the start, and he was using it like an oar. His breathing had become a wheeze that, painful as it must have been, he himself had to grin at.

"How much more is there?" asked Emmett at last. "Seems as if nobody could ever go much further. It's like climbing a flight of stairs without any landing and with no top floor."

"We're about halfway," said Sam. "On the map it measures six an' a half miles, but anglin' this way it's nearer to seven an' a half, I reckon. We're doing about a mile an hour. That's not bad—from what I hear. You'd oughta be glad we ain't packin' up, 'steada down. How'd yuh like

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to be carryin' a gallon o' kerosene, or canned goods—the way I done."

"This the only way to get there?"

"Yeah. Rock goes straight up on three sides. Mebbe a goat could make it, but no man could."

"How much does your metal finder weigh? Musta been a job luggin' that."

They had been resting against the hillside which at that point was fairly open. The scent of sage was in the air. Against their backs the sunbaked soil was soothing.

At the mention of the radio instrument Sam broke off a sprig from a bush near his elbow and started rolling it between his palms. "Yeah," he said finally, "it was tough, all right—batteries an' all." He threw away the ball of crumpled leaves and stood up. "We better be movin'. It don't pay to rest too long. We'll never get there."

It was late in the afternoon, but the sun was still high enough so that it did not hit into their eyes when they reached the level space on which the cabin perched, with the mouth of the mine yawning blackly a short distance beyond.

Suddenly reflected sunlight caught Emmett full in the face. For a moment he thought of similar experiences in his boyhood when somebody had dazzled him from across the street with a mirror, or when the same thing had happened in a classroom; but when he squinted in the direction of the glare, he saw that it had come first from one rail and then from the other of the narrow gauge track running to the ore dump.

If no mining had been done there recently, then why were those rails shiny?

Furthermore, he'd noticed a huge pile of empty cans in a hollow below the trail. Since the mine was long abandoned, those cans should have been so rusted as to be almost indistinguishable against the ferruginous earth. Certainly the labels would have been washed off at least. Nevertheless, although many evidently dated back a couple of years, there was a goodly number that must have been very recent —more than his two companions could have used in a couple of weeks.

THE cabin contained three poorly partitioned compartments, and the whole structure was flimsily and carelessly built against the mountainside, which did double duty as support and rear wall. Probably the main reason for the lean-to type of construction had been to save lumber—it must have been no small job to bring up boards, and the equipment inside, scanty as it was.

Emmett wondered how they'd managed the stove, and the iron bedstead in the middle room. It was significant that they'd stopped at the one bed, although there were accommodations for three more men, a canvas cot in that same center cubby-hole, and a home-made double deck bunk in the far one.

Tacked up everywhere were pictures cut from magazines, all very old—fashionable belles of the Nineties riding in open carriages, or dining with mustached gentlemen, or primping before mirrors.

The calendar in the kitchen was of the present year, however, and there was a pile of periodicals in one corner with the top one dating from that June.

It annoyed him that he was being taken for a fool, and he was on the verge of telling them to come clean, but he decided to wait for a while. They meant business. If he kept his suspicions to himself, he'd probably get some idea of what was under way.

Not long after supper Sam dragged out two canvas packs from a kind of closet that had been excavated in the earthen rear wall. "Might as well be ready for an early start," he said.

Going back, he rummaged around in what looked like a pile of old clothes and uncovered a small nail keg that he rolled to the center of the room. Then he placed a blanket beside it on which he began

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dropping handful after handful from the keg.

"Better heft that," said Jed. "I wouldn't start with more'n thirty or forty pounds."

"I'm watchin' it. We ain't gonna break our backs if we kin help it." He grinned up at Emmett.

"I'd swear," said the young man, "I could handle that little thing by myself."

"Try liftin' it once," said Sam.

Emmett got his fingers under the edges and strained to straighten up. He was used to handling weights, and so much in such a small space was a surprise, but he finally managed it with a muscle cracking heave that almost threw him off balance.

Lowering it to the floor, he shook his head and exclaimed, "Boy! that sure beats all. I'll bet that's close to three hundred pounds."

"Wanna tackle it tomorrow?"

"No thanks!"

Sam was chuckling as he folded in the edges of the blanket. "Yuh never kin tell from the length of his legs how far a frawg kin jump."

"When you're ready to go to bed," said Jed, "take the bottom bunk in the far room. It looks like a boar's nest, but it should be comfortable. It's got a load of old quilts on it that oughta keep yuh warm at the North Pole. Leave the doors open so's you'll get some light from this lamp while you're fixin' it up to suit yourself. We'll be hittin' the hay too—soon as Sam gets through."

"What's the idea of stuffing all the old rags in?" asked Emmett. "Seems to me that the smaller you keep it the better."

"Use your head," said Sam. "The gold's heavy, but there ain't enough of it to make any kind of pack. If we didn't puff out the thing this way it'd give us hell tomorrow swinging on our backs like pendulums."

EMMETT left them there. He was trying to fit the matter of the gold into the scheme of things. About a year before in Los Angeles he'd made the acquaintance of a man who had worked for one of the big mining companies near Denver. The fellow was wearing a tie-pin that looked like a piece of metal-plated rock candy.

Seeing that Emmett was eyeing it curiously, he had explained that it was crystallized gold which his shift boss had given him for cleaning out a pocket of the stuff that his drill had hit into in the tunnel.

That portion of the mine had been cleared of workmen, and he'd been told to go ahead until every last speck was safely removed.

"There wasn't much chance of high-gradin' in that place," he'd said, "an' I wasn't entitled to anything but my regular pay, I suppose, but I always think they could have given me more of a break than just this one lousy crystal. I saw the check they got for what I found. It was for almost a quarter of a million bucks. So I got a stick-pin made of it, and I wear it all the time to remind me that I once handled a fortune for somebody else."

Emmett was thinking about that conversation, and wishing he knew more about mining, because the nail keg was filled with similar crystals, and Jed had said the night before that what they'd found was a cache of placer gold. Common sense told him that metal found in a stream bed would be rounded and smooth.

As soon as he went into the other room, his teeth began to chatter. So long as the sun had shone, the air had stayed warm; and in the kitchen the dying fire had kept off the chill; but the heat of the climb was less now than a memory, and a biting wind was sweeping up the gorge, whistling past the sagging cabin, and finding with icy fingers every crack and knothole in the warped planking.

Removing only his shoes, and loosening his belt, he tried to make himself comfortable for the night; but his legs were too long to let him stretch out, and the tat-

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tered bed clothes were too short to cover him properly.

After a time, however, he managed a kind of compromise; so that even with the unsettled condition of his mind, he was more than half asleep when the other two moved to the center room. He heard them arguing over who was to have the bed, and who was to put out the light; but he must have dropped off then, because he didn't remember anything more.

WHAT woke him he didn't know. He lay among his tumbled rags and listened. The wind had died down so that he could hear quite plainly the measured breathing of Sam and Jed, but much nearer he sensed the presence of some other living thing.

The moon was casting a patch of silvery light on the floor that illuminated the room more fully than had the distant kerosene lamp, yet he could discern nothing out of the way. It was as bare as an empty box.

He had almost convinced himself that he'd imagined or dreamed whatever it was, that perhaps he was growing nervous, that a distant coyote may have been welcoming the night—that nothing near or dangerous had startled him out of a heavy sleep, when the bunk above him creaked as if it held a restless body.

At once he was fully awake. Neither Jed nor Sam could have climbed up there without his knowing it, and anyway he was sure they were outside; but the bulge in the canvas that he could have touched with his knee merely by drawing up his leg looked entirely too centered to be the result of the few odds and ends he'd noticed there earlier in the evening.

And then he felt more than saw a slow movement near his head. Cautiously he turned and stared. The thing itself was so much a part of the gloom that it was indistinguishable, but its movement he immediately recognized — the unhurried rhythmic jerk of a cat's tail.

If the distance from it to the weight above him was any indication of size, his bedfellow was one of Sam's pet aversions —a mountain lion.

A hundred thoughts flashed through his mind. How had it got there? Did it know he was underneath? Could he fight it as he had seen men who trained police dogs, by wrapping quilts around his arms? How strong would it be? What would it do next?

The big cat answered all questions by glaring over the side. It seemed to be getting ready to drop. The hesitant movement was very reminiscent—the preparation for springing of its distant alley clan cousin.

"Sam! Jed! For God's sake!"

At the sound of the voice, the animal launched itself in a tremendous leap that carried it out through the doorway. Probably it was more startled than Emmett.

But by far the outstanding startling event of the evening took place at the end of that beautiful jump. It was a couple of startles, a feline double play. The lion landed squarely on the middle of the still snoring Sam, and when that worthy ex-

ploded into wakefulness with his arms, legs, and lungs all functioning to the limit, it bounded over onto Jed's chest which it used for a springboard to the wide open spaces. The window that it aimed for might have been—except for the tinkling of glass—a paper covered hoop in a circus act.

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Sam, moving remarkably fast for a man awake only a short time, was at the hole where the window had been, firing his revolver. When the hammer clicked emptily, he faced his partner. "What's the idea of settin' there? Light a light!"

"I'm damned if I don't think I'll hafta quit yuh," said Jed. "I'm gettin' too old for such monkeyshines as this here. I kin stand your doggone nightmares when they ain't no more violent than just moanin' in your sleep; though many's the night I wished to God I had cotton in my ears, or else that you'd learn to do it in a way not so blame nerve-wrackin'. But when you start snappin' me outa my rest by jumpin' on my chest, an' bustin' windows, an' shootin' at the moon— Well, I'm through, that's all."

"Why, you blinkin' idjit!" shouted Sam. "Me wake yuh—it was a catamount, as big a one as I ever see. He was tearin' at my throat with his fangs all drippin', an' I fought him off with my bare han's so's he got scared an' jumped away. It was him landed on yuh, but I had him so buffaloed he kep' right on goin'—never even stopped to snap at yuh."

"An' now I got a lunatic for a pardner," complained Jed sadly, striking a match and fumbling with the lantern. "When you're sober yuh talk about alkali dust in your throat; when you're drunk yuh rave about snakes; an' drunk or sober yuh dream about lions. An' now, here yuh are wide awake an' dreamin'. It's the end."

"It was a lion, all right," put in Emmett from the doorway. "He woke me up first by tryin' to get in bed with me. When I yelled for you two, he jumped over on Sam. How in hell did he get in?"

"Two lunatics," said Jed, pulling on his shoes. "I'm gonna get outa this here place before yuh start takin' me for a snake or somethin'."

NOT until they found tracks in the dust outside the cabin was he convinced. A space where the earth wall had crumbled at the roof line in the corner over Emmett's bed told how their visitor had entered.

"We better shove a rock in there when it gets light," said Sam.

By that time it was four o'clock, and they decided to begin the day. At least the big cat had been a most efficient alarm clock.

There was a barely perceptible graying of the sky when Sam and Emmett set out, and they made poor time for almost an hour.

Not only was the trail dangerous in its narrowness, but they could not see the many small stones that littered the way, each one threatening a headlong plunge to oblivion—or a sprained ankle at the very least; and in that treacherous place even a slight injury was something to guard against, especially if it concerned their only means of getting anywhere.

Added to this very real hazard was the possibility that their feline friend might be near at hand; and that loaded down as they were, defense would be difficult. It is no wonder then that they went forward cautiously, eyeing every boulder with distrust, and glancing back frequently to make sure that they weren't being stalked by something lithe on noiseless feet.

They reached the parked car at eleven; dined on canned beans, oranges, and coffee; rested for an hour; and started back. In daylight, Emmett's suspicions seemed somehow less important, the melodramatic imaginings of a schoolboy.

Sam was a jovial soul. He talked incessantly about the scrapes he and Jed had been in, of weeks spent at back-breaking toil, and of a lesser number spent in carousing.

It was hard to believe that the two of them were up to anything vicious. It might prove to be illegal, but they were so little worried over what Emmett might think or do that they hadn't even taken the trouble to lie convincingly. What to them was one episode of many loomed

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large in his mind because it was new and unusual.

AND yet he could not get rid of a feeling of uneasiness. It was compounded of little things; such as Sam's care never to lead the way, nor to come near enough for Emmett to touch him. Down at the trailer, the older man had not lifted a finger to help prepare the meal, but had stood leaning against the wall with his thumbs hooked in his cartridge belt, for all the world like a border town bravo on the prod.

"Well, young feller," he'd said, "I'm more entitled to a rest than you are. I'll tell yuh where to find the stuff, but you kin get it ready."

Of course it was playing safe. Sam had said that between them they were bringing down nearly eight thousand dollars worth of gold on this one trip. He couldn't blame the man for keeping his distance and being watchful. But somehow beneath that bluff and hearty exterior, he sensed something as cold-blooded as a lizard and as heartless as a steel trap.

The second day was slightly more eventful than the first. They did not get started until daylight, and their loads were a good bit heavier. It was nearly one o'clock before they reached the coupe. Sam was very anxious about getting back, but when he tried to rush Emmett, the young man refused on the grounds that exertion right after a meal gave him indigestion.

"What's the difference whether we travel the last mile or so in the dark? Yesterday we began before the sun came up; tonight we'll square things by ending after it's gone down."

Sam shrugged, but said nothing. No more than ten minutes later, however, he got to his feet. "All right, young feller, we're movin'."

"Lock up," said Emmett, "an' start if you want to; I ain't ready yet."

The man stared at him from half-closed eyes. All the good humor was gone from his face. "Get goin'," he commanded, resting his right hand on his six-gun, "an' no more nonsense. You're takin' orders until this job's done."

They climb for a while, Emmett so mad he was picturing himself taking a poke at the other as soon as he had the opportunity; but after a time he began to grin. Sam would have been a fool if he'd left him down there.

So absorbed was he that he almost stepped on a coiled rattlesnake. Although Sam was a good ten paces behind, he spotted it and shouted, "Hey, stand still!"

His revolver cracked. The serpent writhed crazily, its head practically severed.

"I thought it was your stomach bothered yuh," he remarked disgustedly. He blew through the barrel and slipped another cartridge into the cylinder. "I reckon it's affected your eyesight."

"That was some shot."

"'Twasn't so much. Yuh both held still like I said."

The incident smoothed things over. Sam spent the rest of the afternoon discussing weapons, beginning with a description of a Walker-Colt that he claimed was the most accurate revolver ever made, and proving it by telling about some impossible hits he'd scored with one his father had owned. From Colts he drifted to derringers, carbines, Ballard actions, Springfields, Remingtons, Snyder-Enfields, and Winchesters; and he concluded with the usual pronouncement of old-timers that the guns being manufactured today can't compare with those of yesterday, "They don't put the stuff into 'em"—and that marksmanship is a thing of the past. "Why any one of the young fellers in my day could outshoot the ones that's wearin' medals now. I don't say they could do it right off with all this rigamarole of ranges, an' telescope sights, an' what not; but off-hand,

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or on horseback when a shot had to count, they made sure it did. Anybody kin hit a black dot that don't do nothin' but wait to get hit. I wonder what'd happen to one o' these champeens if the target was to suddenly roar an' start runnin' for him."

THAT night Emmett did not sleep very well. Perhaps it was the uncertainty of what lay ahead. It seemed to him that he merely dozed from time to time, and when the partners began to stir, he had already been awake for at least a half hour.

When Sam tiptoed to the doorway and looked in, something told him to feign sleep.

"How's the burro?" whispered Jed.

Sam backed away before he answered. Emmett strained his ears to catch every word, but it was difficult. Jed he could make out, but Sam's voice reached him only as a mumble.

"Tough?" Jed went on. "At the narrow place? Kick his feet out from under—that's all."

Again, exasperatingly, he missed the answer.

"Then it's the gun?" asked Jed.

Sam seemed to become angry; his voice rose a trifle, "Don't be a damn fool—the one in the mine. I'll take the chance of a wrassle."

The two men went out into the kitchen, and Emmett lay there trying to make sense out of what he'd heard. Evidently he was the burro who was to have his feet kicked out from under—instead of being shot. They were out to kill him—"at the narrow place."

He knew that place right enough. It was about a mile down the trail at a point where the stream bed dropped off suddenly, leaving them perched high above on a path chipped out of the face of the cliff, and so narrow they had to edge along it.

It came to him that he was in a very narrow corner. They had made sure that he wasn't expected anywhere; that he wouldn't be missed for some time; and that he was unknown locally.

"One in the mine" pointed to a possible solution. Somehow they had learned that a miner had found a rich pocket. Either they had imprisoned him in his own tunnel; or more likely, had shot him. That last would explain Sam's unwillingness to shoot again. Two bodies with bullets would suggest a third party, but one in the mine—shot—and one broken from a fall would tell a complete story; especially if a pistol of the right caliber were found nearby.

Using this theory, the whole affair became clear. They had needed him even more than they had said. He was their pack animal, and their safety insurance. Nice for them!

In a little while Sam shouted, "Rise an' shine, young feller. Jed's doin' himself proud on breakfast—pancakes, fried eggs, an' biscuits."

"Swell!" called Emmett, sitting up and throwing off the covers; but he was thinking that any attempt at a feast more than faintly suggested the last meal of a condemned man. Nevertheless, he was forewarned. If any tripping was to be tried, he'd make it very interesting for the tripper.

SAM overestimated his own carrying powers that morning and had to stop frequently. His "Let's take five" became so frequent that they were resting more than they were walking. The younger man was himself troubled by extra weight—he had a suspicion that his pack was nearer to a hundred pounds than the sixty it was supposed to be—but as he recognized landmarks that should have been passed much earlier, his spirits rose. At the rate they were moving, it would be late afternoon before they were down; and much of the return journey would have to be made at night.

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The more he thought about it, the better he liked it. Darkness would do a lot to lessen the odds. If Sam were forced to exercise extra vigilance for traveling, he would undoubtedly relax toward Emmett—and there were places where it was possible to scramble up the mountainside — and boulders that could be rolled down.

But the man was cagey. After they'd eaten their late lunch, he made no move, but sat comfortably sprawled on the cushions of the front bunk while Emmett cleaned up.

"It's almost four," said the young man.

"Yeah."

"Hadn't we better start?"

"We're gonna wait for the moon."

"Gosh! That'll mean we won't get up there until it's almost time to come down again."

"We kin rest now."

"What's the idea?"

"Moonlight's better'n no light. I shoulda thought to bring the flash along, but yuh can't think of everything."

"Maybe we better stay here until morning."

"Not if I kin help it."

Time passed slowly. When they tried to get something on the radio, there was only the crackle of static. Emmett hoped that the other would doze, but he did

not; and they sat with the length of the trailer between them, each busy with thoughts.

The moon came up at last, the first rays hitting like a searchlight through a crevice high above, and they started.

It wasn't long before they were both a little worried. While the way lay open, the going though difficult, was possible; but when the gorge began to narrow and twist, they hit into black pockets where they had to move like blind men, feeling for each step.

Even when the light got better, it didn't help much. The eye never really becomes accustomed to a silvery landscape with elongated shadows. Strange fancies are evoked; a prosaic rock becomes a crouching monster; a simple bush a thing of terror.

The experience was nervous but inspiring; Sam's grim silence was an amusing contrast to his usual endless chatter.

"Mountain lions can see in the dark, can't they?" asked Emmett.

"Yeah—they're night prowlers."

"Then they could spot us first."

"Yeah."

HE POUNDED up the trail. "You'd almost think that was one up there, wouldn't you?" (A rock silhouette.)

"Where?"

"Right on that shelf."

"Oh," relief was plain in Sam's voice, "'Tain't nothin'."

"No—but s'posin' it was?"

"Shut up!"

Emmett said nothing for a while, then, "Say, Sam."

"Yeah?"

"They drop on you from above, don't they?"

"Yeah."

"It'd be tough here, wouldn't it?" They were edging along one of the bad places, clinging to the almost perpendicular cliff face.

No answer.

"I wish we were up, don't you?"

"I'm prayin' for it," came the fervent response. "I don't think I got any insides left. I wish we'd stayed below like yuh said."

The trail leveled off and widened a bit

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at that point, and something moved slowly onto the path from above. It was fifteen feet ahead of Emmett, and at first he could not separate it from its shadow.

Since the latest subject of conversation had been the mountain lion, his brain accepted an imperfect stimulus and dressed it up.

"Wow!" he yelled, and backed precipitately.

Immediately he knew he had been frightened by nothing more deadly than a porcupine; and he was about to tell Sam what it was, when the man rushed up with drawn revolver. "Where is it?" he shouted. "Show me!"

It moved again *toward them.* Surprisingly it still might have been a crouching lion in that uncertain light. Even Emmett would have been fooled if he had not recognized it while it was traveling across, instead of down the trail.

"Shift over!" said Sam. "Lemme pot him."

Emmett pressed against the canyon wall, a spat of flame cut into the night a foot from his arm as the six-gun roared.

His hand shot out in an instinctive grab, and the two men grappled frenziedly.

Sam was no weakling, but he had been taken by surprise. Emmett was fighting for his life from the very first.

Slowly the older man's right arm was twisted back until it was behind him and almost to the breaking point. When he weakened, Emmett maneuvered him as far from the edge as possible, so that the revolver in falling would by no chance go over. "Now drop it!" he commanded.

It clattered on the stones.

"Don't try anything," he warned, keeping the other's arm in the same painful position. "I'm gonna pick up that gun, an' if you move I'm gonna fling you as far as I can—the way you planned it for me."

He let go with his left hand and scooped it up with the same movement; then he released the other arm and backed away. "Take off the cartridge belt, an' drop it on the trail—don't toss it or I'll shoot. Do just as I say."

"All right, all right," said Sam. "You got me. Stop talkin' like a movie—I ain't crazy."

"Now take off your other belt," Emmett ordered, "an' unbutton your breeches."

"What's the idea? I'd as soon be shot as freeze to death."

Emmett had to grin. "I'm killin' two birds with one stone—I'm gonna strap up your arms with the belt, an' those pants'll make the best hobble ever seen outside the Panhandle when they're tangled around your boots. Your asthmatic partner'll come wheezing along sooner or later—or else I'll be back with a sheriff. One way or the other you won't die of exposure."

"We could make a deal," said Sam. "We could split three ways. Thirty-five thousand dollars that'd be—more'n you'll ever earn, mebbe. Why not come in with us?"

"Stick your face against the rocks, an' save your breath. You're talkin' like a movie now. I'm a lot younger'n you, but I'm too old to start a long jail stretch—or a rope stretch, if my guessin' means anything."

AS HE was strapping the man's arms, a new idea hit him. Bending down, he located a certain lump in the rear pocket of the dangling breeches. He counted off four hundred dollars and shoved the now emaciated wad back.

"Stealin'!" snarled Sam.

"Not much. You told me I'd get the rest of my pay when the job was done." He pulled the belt up another hole and stepped away. "It's done right now. Whatever else there is, the law can handle."

It must have been nearly midnight;

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he'd been doing the hardest kind of work; it would be hours before he could rest; minor problems such as the necessity for starting a locked car, and the locating of a sheriff, oppressed him—but still he headed back like a boy on a picnic.

One circumstance came close to finishing him. This was the first time he'd made the down trip without a load, and it was so much easier that he swung along at a great rate. What caused the trouble was ordinarily not very dangerous, a place where the face of the cliff had crumbled and filled the gorge for a hundred feet.

Climbing it was a matter of scrambling on hands and knees in loose stone, and of losing half the distance gained on each attempt; descending merely called for small steps and a stiff-legged gait, ending in an exhilarating slide to the stream level.

He hit it too fast, however. Before he was halfway down, the inevitable happened—he lost his balance.

Still, it would have been nothing more than a couple of bruises, and perhaps a rip or two in his clothes, except that he reached the bottom in exactly the right position for his head to collide with a boulder. He twitched and lay still, his legs in icy water.

When he regained consciousness, he plunged his face into the stream in the hope that the cold would take away the dizziness. It helped, but as soon as he started to walk, the top of his skull felt as if it would blow off; and his water-soaked shoes added a squishing accompaniment to the throbbing. Miserably he stumbled on.

Nevertheless, the fall was fortunate. This he realized a moment later when the beam of a flashlight cut through the night — Jed had somehow been near enough to free Sam, and they were after him.

He was safe from discovery among the alders that bordered the creek, but if he had kept on he would have been overtaken where there was no cover.

The narrow place again! It was no more than half a mile beyond the point where the porcupine had posed as a lion.

Jed had been waiting there, probably, to help with the tripping. He would have heard that pistol shot — it had sounded like artillery as the echoes rattled up the gorge—and with the light, he could have reached his trussed-up partner in no time.

Emmett was undecided as to his next move. If he kept on, they'd spot him; and if he hid himself and let them pass, they'd have a double advantage—the car, and the knowledge that he was still in the canyon. They might even go to town and let it be known that something queer was happening on Mount Serena. He'd be left holding whatever bag they wanted to be rid of.

Well, he had the advantage of surprise, even if he couldn't hope to equal Sam in marksmanship. If he could keep them at a distance, the chances of stopping a bullet would be more nearly equal.

They had just started down the slide. He climbed up on a rock at the stream's edge, emptied his revolver at the light, and dropped to the ground.

There was no answering fire, no helpful beam, and no sound except the gurgling water. Keeping low and moving as quietly as he could, he hurried on, reloading as he went.

No sooner had he reached the open than a bullet zipped past. The flame he had not seen, so he did not shoot back. Fortunately the trail was in deep shadow for some distance. What he feared was the hand torch. It was like a searchlight.

But if they snapped it on, they'd be exposed too. Then there'd be the matter of aiming—Sam wouldn't want to waste shots.

He wouldn't let them aim—if six bul-

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lets winging their way as fast as he could pull the trigger would do it.

He was beginning to think that they were not following, when the beam picked him out. Proceeding according to plan, he literally sprayed lead, and fell flat on his face.

Six nicely placed shots nicked the rocky well above him.

He crawled along like an ungainly bear for some distance. Every minute he expected to be picked out by the light again. Hours seemed to go by.

Finally he came to the conclusion that —wonder of wonders—a lucky shot had put out the torch. He couldn't believe it, but there was no other reason that he could see for the continued darkness.

They must be up to something tricky. He went over in his mind the path ahead. The only possibility was that they were trailing him grimly, waiting until he reached the plain. There he'd be a perfect target when he made a dash for the car.

But if they couldn't use the flash to pick their way, he could equal their speed any old time—especially with Jed along.

It was an uncomfortable stroll to be taking in the wee hours of the morning with the gooseflesh spreading along his spine every time he thought of Sam's ability with shooting irons. But mountain lions and rattlesnakes were forgotten—bullets had sung at him that night.

At length he caught the welcoming glint of moonlight reflected from the hood of the coupe. Weary as he was, he hurried.

Sam had the key to the trailer, but Jed had a bunch containing those for the car.

Emmett rapped the glass in the door window with the butt of the revolver; it cracked in a thousand spider web lines, but it did not break. A rock lay at his foot. He picked it up and crashed it through.

The ignition lock was on the steering post, part of an arrangement that also held the wheel immovable. A quick jerk snapped whatever held the wheel; and the two wires on the switch he yanked from their binding posts and twisted together. As they met, a blue spark told him that the current was on.

The motor caught at the first touch of the starter—he was off for town!

THE dusty road slid by, and the sky began to grow light. His headlights became increasingly uncertain as they sought to pierce the puzzle of a landscape waiting for the dawn. Sleep stalked him while the motor hummed a lullaby; he let down the windows and opened the ventilator so that the morning chill might help him fight it off.

The concrete highway was under him! Down went the accelerator to the floor.

Just as the sun's first rays were tinting with pink the windows of Grange City, the black coupe with its overshadowing trailer pulled up on Main Street. Emmett climbed out and stalked like a man without knee joints into the All-American Diner.

"Coffee," he said, "black."

He downed it before he went on, "Is there a highway patrol station near here?"

The counterman eyed him. "Yuh in trouble—or lookin' for it?"

"I gotta see a cop."

The man was staring at his forehead. Emmett touched the bump, realizing that he must be quite a looking specimen—to say nothing of the six-gun holstered on his thigh.

"This is the county seat. We got a sheriff—Tom Judd. He do?"

"Where'll I find him?"

The man took a deep breath. "I'll call him."

The next thing Emmett knew, someone had him by the shoulder. Like a punch drunk boxer, he woke up fighting; but he was grabbed from all sides.

A lean man with gray stubble on his cheeks was gazing at him with a pair of

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pale blue eyes. Their coldness brought him to his senses. "You the sheriff?"

"Yeah."

"I'd like to talk with you alone."

The man nodded. "Go on out to your car."

Not once did he interrupt while Emmett poured out his tale; then he said, "So you're the lad that broke Big Bill Dantry's jaw."

"What?"

"Think nothin' of it. It was a good job. In fact, you seem to be tryin' to save me a lotta trouble. Those two birds who took you under their wings are as oily a pair of crooks as ever lived. They been gettin' away with more than anybody since Wes Hardin. That mine on Serena belongs to a poor old galoot by the name of Bill Lazzer. He's been there for God knows how many years. Was prosperous a while back, till his vein petered out. Since then he's been livin' on hopes an' kind neighbors. Prob'ly he struck it, finally; an' went off his nut. Then, like you say, them two buzzards got wind of it. It woulda been his luck to run across them before anybody else an' spill the whole thing."

"You goin' up after them?"

"I reckon!"

"What about the gold in the trailer?"

"Son, Lazzer has plenty o' relations. It'll be a grand free-for-all. But don't worry your head about that—or anything. I got a bed in my house that'll just about fit you, an' after you've tucked away all the breakfast you kin eat, that's all you've got to worry about from now till whenever—"

"WHENEVER" happened to be about three o'clock that afternoon. Emmett came out of the sheriff's guest room to find the man sitting on his porch reading a newspaper.

"Didja get 'em?" he asked.

Judd grinned up at him and shook his head. "We didn't have to—you done it."

"Who—me?"

"Yeah—both of 'em."

"I killed 'em?"

"Well, not exac'ly. Jed Blacker's got daylight let into him in three places though, an' Sam's right hand won't never be the same—not that it makes any difference."

"What about the old guy?"

"Dead—over a week, I reckon. Way at the end of his tunnel. Located him by followin' our noses."

"Do I hafta stay here?"

"No, son, you're free as air. We got a full confession outa Jed. It was while we was bringin' him down, an' believe me it was one Godawful job. We had to rig up a stretcher, an' in one place we had to use a rope. He thought he was gonna die right then, so he up an' told the whole thing.

"It was pretty much like you figgered. An' if you're all rested up an' anxious to be on your way, there's a California bus comin' through about five-thirty that'll get you in to L. A. around midnight. D'ye wanta make it?"

"Yeah." As Emmett slipped his hand into his pocket and felt the brown envelope, he smiled. "I don't think I'll be doin' any hitch-hikin' for a while."

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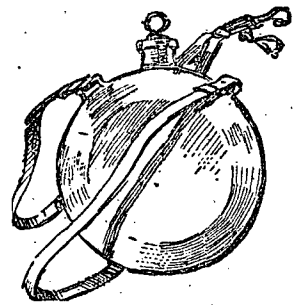
Adventurers All



Just Mud

DURING the spring and summer of 1933, I was a member of the crew of the submarine chaser, No. 353. The chaser's duty was to take depth soundings near the shore, where the mother ship, *U.S.S. Hannibal,* could not go. The *Hannibal* was working under direct orders from the Hydrographic Survey Office, Washington, D. C., charting Pacific waters, west and north of the Republic of Panama.

Our duties, aside from inshore soundings, consisted of radio depth sounding and the erection of steel towers for triangulation purposes. At times we would have to carry the parts of these towers several miles inland. There we might have to clear out jungle growth or scale a cliff to reach the desired position. As these towers were eighty and one hundred feet high, they had a concrete base.

This is just to show the kind of country we had to go through to take care of our work. Sometimes it took as long as ten days to prepare for a one day job.

The locations for these towers were sent us by radio, from the *Hannibal.* Sometimes we would be sent to a certain part of the coast to await further orders. At such times we might have several hours of leisure to use as we pleased.

This particular time, we received orders to proceed to Parita Bay located about sixty or seventy miles from Panama City. Parita Bay has very few people living near it, though there are several empty native huts along its shores. It has a sandy beach as far as the eye can see, sloping upward to a height of thirty or forty feet. There is also a river which cuts in at such an angle as to make it almost invisible, unless one knew it were there.

At high tide this river is deep and wide at the mouth for a half mile inland. At low tide it isn't over ten feet wide and a foot deep.

So it was on this particular afternoon four of my shipmates and myself set out on a little pleasure tour. Just as though we didn't get enough hiking in the line of duty.

Carrying one rifle and a canteen of water, we followed the right hand bank of the river three or four miles, till it narrowed down to just a trickle of water. Finding it was getting along in the afternoon, we decided to cross the river and return on the opposite bank as we knew the tide would be on the ebb, so we could cross below.

Well, we reached the seashore where we must cross the almost dry river bed to reach our boat landing. The river bed looked firm enough with only a trickle of water in the middle.

We started out confidently, but the nearer we got to the water, the farther we sank in the mud, or blue muck—for that is what it was. We had all seen samples of ocean bottom taken from a three mile depth, but that mud seemed far worse to us.

Finally we were in the center of a sixty foot strip and up to our armpits, with as

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far to go on as to go back. We decided if we went back we would have a long roundabout tramp, so we kept on for the crossing.

Now we really hit some mud. I was the shortest one of the group and I never felt any bottom to that ooze. Afterwards the others said the same. Most of the time it was over my arms and all of us had to keep moving as fast as possible to keep from going under.

To turn back would have been fatal, I am sure. An instant's stop was almost too much.

Just about ten feet from our goal I heard a cry, and as I was the fourth man there could be only one behind me. A six-footer we will call Bill. When I turned, the mud was up to Bill's chin and in his hands held high over his head, was the rifle he had carried all afternoon. I grabbed the rifle, gave one pull and Bill came out enough to get moving again.

Well, since I'm writing this, we all arrived on good old Terra Firma. And the first thing we did? We all broke out in a big hearty laugh, even if there were a few quivers in it.

I suppose some will ask, Why didn't they throw away their rifles? Don't ask me either; I'm only glad to be writing this.

David Dozer, Jr.

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The Sheriff Had Been Heard to Opine that Red Had the Nerve of a Bob-cat

THE SHADOW HUNTER

By GENE VAN
Author of "Salesmanship," etc.

"TOOT'MS two is four. Toot'ms three is six. Toot'ms—"

The shadow of a circling buzzard passed over the sandy yard, and little Red Harris shifted on the top step of the house and squinted up at the desert scavenger, which sailed majestically away. Red held a dog-eared arithmetic in his hands, half-closed, as he tried to repeat the multiplication tables.

Red was sixteen years of age, an orphan, who had been taken in tow by an old prospector, later to die from a bullet. It had been fired by a bandit, who wanted the old man's mine. This unfortunate incident rather threw Red Harris on the bounty of Ocotillo City—and Ocotillo City was in no way prepared to take care of orphans.

But there was Spike Haslam, the big-hearted sheriff whose wife had died when their baby was born; Spike took Red into his home. The baby, now four years of age, known as Little Pardner, was somewhere behind the house, playing with Glub and Fitt. Little Pardner had selected their names. P-f-i-t-t would likely be the proper spelling for the cat's name, but F-i-t-t was easier. Glub, was only a mongrel pup, in whose veins flowed every strain of canine in Ocotillo County.

Red was clad in faded blue overalls and a gray shirt, which had belonged to Spike Haslam, and did not fit very well. Red was bony and freckled, red-headed, blue

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eyed. He was sixteen, but looked younger.

"Toot'ms four is eight. Toot'ms five—well, my gosh!"

The exclamation was occasioned by the appearance of Little Pardner, who came toddling his bow-legged way around the corner, followed by Glub and Fitt. Little Pardner was short and fat, overall-clad, with a little straw hat sitting exactly on the top of his blonde head, with a whang-leather string tied under his fat chin.

"What on earth have you got in yore hand?" exploded Red, flinging the book aside, and getting quickly to his feet.

"Woim," replied Little Pardner, dangling an object in his chubby right hand.

Red jerked it away from him and flung it aside.

"Worm!" snapped Red. "Little Pardner, will you ever learn to know the difference between a worm and a baby sidewinder? That dog-gone thing is poisonous! Make yuh sick."

"Huh?" Little Pardner looked blankly at Red. "No sick."

"Lemme see yore hands."

An examination showed no puncture marks. The sidewinder was only a baby snake, but its fangs were fully developed. Something was twisting around in the baby's overall pocket, and out popped the head of a horned toad. Quickly it fell out and scuttled away.

"You don't happen to have any Gila Monsters inside yore shirt, do yuh?" asked Red soberly.

"No," replied the baby, shaking his head violently.

"Stop shakin' yore head thataway," ordered Red. "Some day you'll snap the blamed thing off. Are you goin' to keep yore hands off them worms?"

"Sure," grunted Little Pardner. "Toads, too?"

"Horned-toads won't hurt yuh. But you let them sidewinders alone."

"Bite baby?"

"Yo're dog-gone right, they'll bite baby! Now you go 'long and play—here comes Geography Jones, and I'm only started on my toot'ms."

GEOGRAPHY JONES limped through the gate and up the board sidewalk to the porch. He was past middle age, tall and lean, dressed in faded range clothes. His narrow face was tanned from the desert sun, his huge mustache needed trimming. Geography was Haslam's deputy, and Red's tutor. In his younger days, Geography had lived in the east where he taught school. Due to some trouble in the town, Geography headed west and took up cattle raising until Haslam appointed him deputy.

With the lack of schools in Ocotillo City, Geography had agreed to teach Red. The school had been interrupted for the last week, due to a bank robbery in which Geography stopped a piece of lead in his right leg. For several days Geography had been in bed and when he was up and around, he had to help Haslam search for the bandits.

The sheriff had captured one of them when they attempted to escape and had put him in jail, but the two others had made a clean getaway. The one prisoner was a total stranger to everyone in Ocotillo City.

"Hyah, Geography?" greeted Red.

"Fine, Red. See yuh been a studyin'."

"Just gettin' on my toot'ms," grinned Red.

"Guess you musta been takin' a vacation too," remarked the deputy.

"I've been doin' a lot of thinkin' about that robbery."

"You better think about arithmetic," said Geography.

Geography picked up the arithmetic book, turned to the page he wanted and then looked at Red.

"Let's hear yuh, Red."

Red slowly repeated the tables much to Geography's satisfaction.

"That's fine. Better do some more studyin'."

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"All right. Say, Geography, isn't there somethin' I can do to make Little Pardner lay off playin' with snakes?"

"Little Pardner still pickin' up things, eh?" grunted Geography, tugging at his mustache.

"Yeah. Say, I wonder what he's up to now?" Red got to his feet and went down the steps and around the house.

Little Pardner was busy playing with Glub and Fitt. He looked at Red and then went on playing. Red watched him for several minutes before he returned to the front porch.

"Everythin' all right?" asked Geography.

"Yeah. For once he hasn't a snake in his hand."

"Sure is a great little kid. I guess I'll have to start teachin' him pretty soon."

"What does the Doc say about your leg?" asked Red.

"It's gettin' along fine. Doc says to come in every other day to have the bandage changed."

"Can't the sheriff make that prisoner talk?"

"Naw. Not a word out of him and he's been in jail nearly a week. Won't even ask for food; can yuh beat that? Man, that's one time I'd talk, and plenty." Geography tugged at his mustache as he glanced up the dusty road.

Red turned his head and looked in the same direction.

"Looks like someone comin'," said Red.

"Yeah, and if I ain't mistaken, it's Hank Tucker," grunted Geography.

"That's who it is all right," replied Red. "Guess he'll stop here before goin' up town."

HANK TUCKER reined his tall roan in alongside the fence and dismounted, tying the reins to the fence. Hank Tucker was a big solidly built cowman, owner of the Lazy T, and one of Ocotillo's leading citizens. In addition to this, he was Haslam's best friend and staunch supporter. He often dropped in for a meal or to spend the evening.

"Is the sheriff in, boys?" asked Tucker.

"I just left him up town, Hank," replied Geography.

"How's everything around here?"

"Just fine," replied Red.

HAS Spike forced the prisoner to talk yet?" asked Tucker.

"Not yet. That guy sure can keep his mouth shut."

"Probably one of a tough border gang," said Tucker.

"He looks like one," said Red.

"I wonder who those other men were that were with him," said Tucker.

"I been a wonderin' the same thing," muttered Geography. "They musta knowed somethin' about the bank because they nearly got away without anyone seein' 'em."

"Looks mighty funny to me," grunted Tucker. "I've been thinkin' about Slater and Berg over on that small spread at the foot of the Calico hills."

"I don't know much about them. They've acted mighty queer since they settled in there. Saw 'em in town yesterday, but I listened around and they never mentioned the robbery."

"I've been watchin' them for a long time," remarked Tucker. "Some of my cattle have been missing, but I can't accuse anyone without proof."

"I told Spike that we'd better look into 'em. This feller had to have two companions—and there's two of 'em."

"Here comes the sheriff now," exclaimed Red, getting to his feet. "I better get Little Pardner."

By this time Spike Haslam was coming through the gate. He was a tall lanky man past middle age. He wore faded range clothes, high heeled boots, and a tall sombrero. His faded blue vest was flapping as he walked. On the right side of his vest was pinned his badge.

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"Hyah, folks. Looks like a reunion," he greeted.

"Just dropped in to see yuh," grinned Tucker, shaking hands with Haslam.

Haslam sat down on the steps with Tucker, and rolled a cigarette. Two riders came up the road past the house and waved to the sheriff. He returned their salute and lighted his cigarette.

"Those two are tough lookin' hombres," observed Geography.

"Look salty," amused Tucker.

"Oh, I guess Slater and Berg are all right," said Haslam.

"Just what do you know about 'em?" asked Tucker.

"Not much. They're pretty close lipped."

"I was a wonderin' if they knew our silent friend," said Geography.

"I dunno. Maybe we'd better look into 'em a little more," grunted Haslam. "Where's Little Pardner?"

"Red went to get him when he saw yuh comin'," replied Geography.

Just then Red came around the corner, dragging Little Pardner by the right hand. Glub and Fitt followed closely at Little Pardner's heels. In his left hand, Little Pardner carried his hat. Red helped him up the steps and he climbed into his father's lap.

"What yuh got in your hat?" asked Haslam.

"Bugs," replied the baby, handing his father his hat.

The hat was full of bugs and spiders along with several ounces of sand. Haslam emptied the hat and placed it on the tow head.

"Leave those bugs alone," warned Haslam.

"That's what I been tellin' him," said Red.

"You'd better do what Red tells yuh, Little Pardner."

"Uh-huh," grinned the baby.

"Better go inside and rest up. I'll fix dinner pretty soon."

"Sure."

Little Pardner got up and scampered into the house.

"Sure is a fine boy you've got," said Tucker.

"Great little fellow. Don't know what I'd do without him."

"Hasn't that prisoner said a word yet?" asked Red, changing the subject.

"Not a word," sighed Haslam. "But I think I'll have him talkin' plenty before long. I gave him a good scare this afternoon and he seemed a bit nervous. Started pacing the floor."

"I sure hope he talks," said Geography. "I want just one crack at those guys that shot me."

"I hope you get it, Geography," said Tucker, getting to his feet. "Well, I gotta get goin'. Have to be back at the ranch for dinner tonight. If you need any help, Spike, my men and I are at your service."

"That's fine, Hank. I'll remember that."

Geography and Haslam went into the house, leaving Red alone on the porch. Red picked up his arithmetic book and opened it, but never looked into it. His mind was wandering around in circles, trying to figure out who the other two bank robbers were. He was leaning against the porch post when dinner was ready.

RIGHT after dinner, Haslam and Geography left Red with the dishes and headed up town. Red soon finished the dishes and then settled down in a big

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chair by the large fireplace. The fire was going and it lighted the room. Little Pardner was sprawled on the floor looking at pictures in a book.

"You'll have to hit the hay pretty soon, Little Pardner," said Red.

"Uh-huh," grunted the baby.

Red picked up a book and looked through it. It was getting near Little Pardner's bedtime; so Red went to the small bed and turned down the covers. Little Pardner watched him, and when Red was finished he helped Little Pardner change to his nightgown. He tucked the little tow-head into bed, and grinned down at him.

"You little bug-hunter," Red said kindly.

"Gimme kiss, Red."

"Huh? Oh, sure. There yuh are, snake-hunter. Sleep tight."

"How?"

"How to sleep tight? Oh, I dunno. Go to sleep."

Red put another small mesquite root on the fire and went to his little room, which was just off the main room. All it contained was a bed, a crude dresser and a home-made table, near the head of his bed. The door was nearly closed.

Red lighted a small oil-lamp, took off his clothes and crawled in between the blankets. Propping up his pillow, he took his arithmetic and began studying by lamplight. He had been studying about an hour, when he heard the front door open. He knew it was time for the sheriff to come home; so he paid no attention. He heard heavy footsteps in the main room, but Haslam did not come to his door. Red thought this was queer, because the sheriff always came to tell him good night, after they talked for a few minutes.

"Is that you, Sheriff?" asked Red, and for some reason Red knew that it was not.

Quickly he slid out of bed and went to the partly closed door. With only the firelight for illumination he could see the dark bulk of a man leaning over Little Pardner's bed. Behind the man was his shadow bulking huge against the wall and there was a gun in the shadow's hand.

Wham! The report of a heavy gun shook the small house. Red fell backwards, his face stinging from splinters, as the heavy bullet tore through the edge of the door. Almost against the bed, Red sat up, dazed, wondering what it was all about, his ears still ringing from the report of the heavy shot.

He heard Little Pardner cry out. Then came the sound of heavy, hurrying footsteps, a muffled oath, and the door banged shut. Red got shakily to his feet and went to the connecting doorway. Quickly he went to Little Pardner's bed, only to find it empty.

"Well, my gosh!" exclaimed Red helplessly. "Where's Little Pardner?"

Then he ran back and quickly dressed. Jerking his hat tightly on his red head, he ran to the front door, just as the sheriff opened it. They nearly collided.

"What's the idea, Red?" asked the sheriff quickly, coming inside.

"A—a man got Little Pardner!" gasped Red. "He shot at me and—Little Pardner's gone!"

"Now, wait a minute!" exclaimed the sheriff. "That can't be possible. Little Pardner—gone?"

"That's what I'm telling you," wailed Red. "See where he shot the edge off the door. My face is full of splinters and—"

"What's this?" asked the sheriff, picking up a square of folded paper from the bed. Quickly he unfolded it and read, his face gray in the flickering light. "My God!" he muttered. "Red, listen to this:

> 'You will release your prisoner by midnight tomorrow night, or you will never see your kid alive again. Keep this to yourself. If you want to make it look like an escape, all right, but don't trail him—or the kid dies. Remember—tomorrow night, by midnight.'"

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"It—it means that you've got to let that feller go, or we'll—" Red left the rest unsaid.

Haslam looked grimly at Red. "That's what the note says, son. Oh, the dirty killers! Takin' a helpless baby."

"And it says to not let anybody know," breathed Red.

"Yes—that's their orders. But we can tell Geography. Go get him, will yuh, Red? I—I want to sit down here a while."

Red lost no time in finding the crippled deputy, and they hurried down to the sheriff's house.

"I reckon they've got us where the hair is short, Spike," said Geography sadly. "The only thing to do is to cut that feller loose."

"If I do," said Haslam grimly, "I'll get the boy back—they say."

"That's the worst of it, Spike—takin' their word."

"I could do it," muttered Haslam, "but I'd have to resign. After it was over, I'd have to tell what I done."

"They'd understand," said Geography.

"Why not get the man who got Little Pardner?" queried Red.

"How?" groaned Haslam. "You never seen him, Red. We haven't a thing to go on."

"Wait a minute," said Geography, imbued with an idea. "Berg and Slater rode past here today, and it kinda seemed to me that they was sizin' up the place. They could have found out that only Red and Little Pardner are here in the evenin'. I was talkin' to Tucker—why, you was here, Spike. Tucker said he'd been losin' cattle. Tucker don't think much of them two—either."

"There was only one man," said Red.

"Sure. But the other would stay outside and act as a guard."

"It sounds reasonable," nodded Haslam. "I'm goin' out to their place—tonight."

"I'm goin' along," declared Geography. "You can't ride, with that bad leg."

"Spike, in a case like this I could ride, even if I didn't have *any* legs. C'mon."

"How about me goin' along?" queried Red anxiously.

"You better stay here, son," replied the sheriff. "I can't take any chances on you stoppin' a bullet."

Red threw more fuel on the fire, and for an hour or more he sat there, staring into the flames, wondering what to do. He knew something; something that he had not told, and he sat there trying to remember, visualizing the men who rode the Ocotillo range. He had seen them all, and what Red had seen, he remembered. Finally he went to bed, when the fire had burned to a dim bed of coals.

IT WAS morning, when Spike Haslam and Geography Jones came home, grim-faced, saddle-worn. Red had breakfast started, but he came down to the stable. The sheriff looked at him and shook his head.

"Wasn't there?" asked Red huskily.

The sheriff shook his head.

"Wasn't anybody there," he replied wearily.

"Funny thing," muttered Geography. "Their supper was burned up on the stove. Somethin' must have stampeded 'em."

"It gets me," sighed the sheriff.

"I'll burn our breakfast, if I ain't careful," said Red, and hurried to the house.

The two men went uptown as soon as they had finished breakfast. Red washed the dishes, closed the house and went up to the main street, where he sat down on a corner of the sidewalk near the most popular hitch-rack in town. Nearly every rider would pass him, after he had tied his horse.

It was Saturday, the day that everybody came to town, and the hitchracks filled rapidly.

Nearly every cowboy and cattleman in the country knew Red, and they stopped to speak a word or two. Usually Red circulated around town, playing with some

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boys of his age, who came to town; but on this day Red seemed to stay in one spot.

From the sheriff's office, almost directly across the street from Red's position, Geography Jones studied Red. He called Haslam's attention to him, and together they watched.

"He's been there for a couple hours Spike," said Geography. "He ain't leavin' that spot. If you'll notice, he talks with everybody, but when they go on, he stays put. What do yuh reckon he's got on his mind?"

"I dunno, Geography," sighed the harassed sheriff. "Red's a queer one. Got the nerve of a bob-cat."

"And the brain of a red fox," added the deputy. "Yuh know, the more I watch the kid, the more I figure he's got somethin' on his mind."

"I wish I knew what to do," said the sheriff. "I've got until midnight."

"Yeah—that's right. Well, yuh can turn that feller loose between now and then. If yuh make up yore mind to do it—I—I'll get that hacksaw in the lean-to, and saw them bars. We can make it look like a jail-break, yuh know."

"I couldn't do a thing like that, Geography."

"I can—and you don't need know it, Spike."

An hour later Red was still at his post. The influx was over, but Red stayed there an extra half hour, just to be sure, it seemed, before he wandered away, his brow furrowed.

"Nobody'd believe me," he muttered to himself. "They'd say I'm just a crack-brained desert kid. Mebbe I am. Mebbe I'm wrong, but it's the best I can do."

But up at the sheriff's office Geography was saying:

"I tell you, Spike, he's got somethin' on his mind—and it ain't arithmetic. We ain't got a darn thing to go on—me and you; so it might be worth while to watch and see what he does."

"All right," nodded the sheriff, but added. "Remember, midnight is the deadline."

AFTER dinner, Haslam and Geography went back up town. Red was busy in the kitchen when they left. As soon as he figured that they were up town, he tossed the dish towel on the table and left the room through the back doorway.

He made his way around in the dark to the right of the house to the door of a small lean-to. Lighting a match, he slowly opened the door and entered. The place had been built for a storeroom and tool shop. Red spent several minutes poking around in the tools before he emerged with a hacksaw.

After closing the door, he hurried up town, keeping to the shadows so that his presence would not be known. He stopped at the corner of the sheriff's office and peered inside. No one was there, but a small oil lamp burned on the desk. Quickly Red circled the building and came underneath the barred window.

Without hesitation, he tossed the hacksaw through the opening and then hurried around the corner. He heard a grunt inside the cell as the prisoner discovered the tool. Soon the sound of sawing the bars reached his ears. It seemed hours before it finally ended. Risking a chance, Red peered around the corner and saw the prisoner slowly climbing out of the window.

The man looked around for a few minutes before he moved off in the shadows toward the east. When he was far enough away, Red slipped from his hiding place and followed at a safe distance.

Soon they were away from the buildings and the man was hurrying through the brush, just a short distance from the road. Red slipped from brush to brush, trying to keep concealed. Several times the man stopped and turned around, but Red managed to be out of sight. Finally the man was convinced that he hadn't been followed, so he broke into the open and

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started at a faster pace. Red had to nearly run to keep up with the man.

They had traveled several miles when the fugitive stopped by some boulders and sat down to rest. Red slipped in close and hunched behind a mesquite clump. Just as the man was ready to go on, a

rider came swinging down the road. The man slipped behind the boulder and let the rider pass. The rider was out of sight before the man continued his hurried pace.

Red's feet were sore from stepping on sharp rocks in the dark when they came upon a cluster of lights which marked Tucker's ranchhouse. The man stopped and looked around before advancing. Red slipped in as close as he dared and watched the house. The man went into the yard and up to the front door where he knocked. The door opened and the man went in, closing the door behind him.

"Can yuh beat this?" muttered Red slowly. He shook his head and began looking around for a place to get in. He went through the gate and then began circling the house. Near the rear of the house he discovered a small balcony. There were two large windows opening onto it and Red could see a dim light up there.

RED worked his way up a supporting post and grabbed hold of the railing, pulling himself up and over onto the balcony. He went to the windows and tried them. The first was locked, but the other was only latched. Red opened it slowly and looked inside. The air was heavy from tobacco smoke and the odor of whisky. The oil lamp had been turned low, but Red could see that there was a bed on the far side of the room near the door, which led to the stairway.

On the right was a home-made dresser, sitting out a foot or more from the wall. Red stepped inside, leaving the window open for a handy exit. He moved noiselessly over to the bed and lifted back the blankets. There was Little Pardner, sleeping peacefully.

On a box beside the bed was a Colt .45. Red looked around, and jerked back suddenly.

In the corner of the room sat two men against the wall, bound tightly, their faces almost concealed by the cloth used to gag them. Red had no idea who they were. He picked up the gun and looked at it.

From downstairs came the mumble of voices. Red quickly shoved the big gun inside the waistband of his overalls. He picked up Little Pardner in his arms, but it startled the youngster, who cried out sharply.

"What was that?" asked a voice sharply from the foot of the stairs. A mumbled reply was inaudible as footsteps came thumping up the wooden treads.

Red realized that he couldn't escape with the baby; so he wisely dumped him back on the bed, blew out the lamp and made a dive for the heavy dresser. Quickly he squeezed behind it, holding the big Colt in both hands.

Two men came into the room, stopped short.

"Who blew out that lamp?" said one of them softly. "It was—"

"Window's open. Mebbe the wind—"

"I'll light the lamp. Must be all right, I—wow! That chimney is hot."

The man scratched another match and lighted the lamp. The ex-prisoner was standing just inside the doorway, while the other man had turned and was looking

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at Little Pardner, who was sitting up in bed, his eyes wide.

"Why—where's that gun?" said the man huskily. "I left it—"

He whirled and looked straight at Red, who was head and shoulders over the heavy dresser. The man was Hank Tucker, the sheriff's best friend. For a moment or two he stared in amazement. The heavy Colt .45 was gripped tightly in both of Red's skinny hands, and it was pointing straight at Tucker.

"What are you doin' here?" asked Tucker hoarsely, moving a few inches toward Red, his hands dangling at his sides.

"Stay right where yuh are," warned Red thinly. His voice seemed to come from a great distance. Tucker laughed.

"Nosey kid, eh? Why, you miserable little—"

TUCKER'S hand came up, gripping the mate to the gun Red had, but the red-head's trigger finger squeezed tightly, and the room shuddered from the report of the forty-five.

The ex-prisoner was diving headlong against the dresser, and his weight smashed it back against Red so hard that Red dropped the big gun. Hank Tucker was sprawled on the floor, arms outstretched.

"Gotcha!" panted the other man, picking up the dropped gun. "I'll blow yore red top-knot—"

"Don't move!" snapped a voice from the doorway. "Drop that gun, or I'll drill yuh!"

Slowly the ex-prisoner's hand relaxed on the gun and it thudded to the floor. In the doorway stood Spike Haslam and Geography Jones. Red shoved the dresser away and limped out to pick up the gun. The prisoner was quickly handcuffed. Haslam picked up Little Pardner and hugged him tightly. The little boy did not seem perturbed. He said:

"Red go boo-o-o-m!"

"Yo're dog-gone right, Red went boom!" explained the sheriff. "And as far as I'm concerned, he's the greatest boomer of us all."

"Watch this feller, while I cut these two loose," ordered Geography.

The two prisoners were Slater and Berg, numb from the tight ropes, and barely able to talk.

"They was goin' to kill us," said Berg. "They walked in on us last night, when we was cookin' supper. Tucker said he was goin' to kill the kid, 'cause the kid knew him. Then they was goin' to kill me and Slater and dump us in a prospect hole, making you think we killed the kid and pulled out of the country. They said you'd put the deadwood on us, anyway."

Grimly the sheriff examined Tucker.

"He'll live to pay for this," he declared. "Yore shot was a little high, Red—but it was a dandy." He turned to the frightened prisoner.

"All right—talk," he said. "You wouldn't talk before—but keepin' still won't help yuh none now. Go ahead."

"Hank's my brother," said the man huskily. "I broke prison in Nevada, and he was helpin' me hole-up here. We decided to knock over the bank. Hank needed money; so he agreed."

"I see," said the sheriff quietly. "—— Tucker's foreman was the third member of the gang."

"How'd you know that?"

"He tried to throw down on us, when we came in," replied Haslam. "If you hadn't been so busy up here, mebby you'd have heard him hit the floor, when I bent a gun over his head."

Red scratched his head thoughtfully, a half-grin on his lips.

"How'd you fellers happen to be here?" he asked.

"Followin' you," replied the sheriff. "We watched yuh throw that saw through the bars, and we've been on yore trail all evenin'."

"Gee, that's funny!" exclaimed Red. "I

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didn't figure anybody was followin' *me*. But we all got here in time."

"And I've got my baby back, thanks to you, Red. But," Haslam's eyes shifted to the unconscious Hank Tucker, "Red, how did you ever guess this? You knew that Tucker was a friend. How on earth did you ever make a guess like this one?"

"It—it was the shadow of the man who stole Little Pardner," replied Red. "It was a big shadow on the wall. I saw the shadow's hand come up, holdin' the gun. That's why I sat out there by the long hitch-rack all day, watchin' everybody, who came in."

"We knew you had somethin' on yore mind," said Geography. "But what was you lookin' for, Red?"

"I was lookin' for a left-handed man; a man who wore his gun on the left side. I knew Tucker did—but I knew he was your best friend. You wouldn't have believed it. But he was the only man in town who wore his gun on the left-hand side; so I turned the prisoner loose and he came straight here."

"Well, that beats anythin' I ever heard!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"Same here," said Slater. He held his hand out to Red. "If there's anythin' that me and Berg can ever do for yuh, redhead—all you've got to do is ask for it. You saved our lives tonight."

"And he saved my baby," said the sheriff huskily, hugging the youngster. "Little Pardner, you can thank Red, can'tcha?"

"Red don't like worms," replied the baby. "Red go boo-o-om!"

"Shucks, Red's growed up," declared Geography. "I'll betcha he's entitled to some pistol lessons, along with his arithmetic."

"Is there anythin' wrong with my shootin'?" asked Red calmly.

"Red, there ain't anythin' wrong with you in any way," declared the sheriff warmly. "You take Little Pardner home, while me and—wait a minute; I got that wrong. I'll take Little Pardner home, while you and Geography take care of the prisoners.

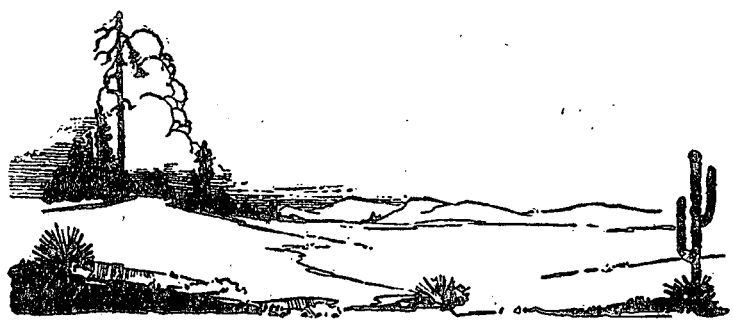
"You're a better hand with outlaws than I am. Berg, you and Slater hitch up a team; so they can take all the casualties to Ocotillo City."

"Aw, I'm just a kid," said Red, his eyes wide over the proffered responsibility.

"You were," corrected the big sheriff. "Just as soon as I can put the papers through, you'll be the sheriff's son; so yuh might as well start takin' orders. Shove that forty-five inside your waistband, and get busy."

And the sheriff disappeared toward the stairway, holding Little Pardner in his arms. Red took a deep breath, looked queerly at Geography, and said:

"Well, Pardner, we might as well start cleanin' up."



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Dan and Ed Hit Town 'fore Night and It's Liable to Hit them 'fore Mornin'

POKER SAVVY

By

G. W. BARRINGTON

Author of "Showdown at Palisade," "Pete's Good Deed," etc.

I

Murder Trail

RANGER SERGEANT DAN DELANEY swung his tall form out of saddle and squatted on his spurred heels to make quick inspection of the shattered body that lay sprawled grotesquely on the winding white trail that paralleled the rock walled canyon. Back of where Delaney's sorrel saddler stood with pointed ears cocked suspiciously at the grisly figure, Ed Castor sat his boney white mount, watching Delaney with obvious uneasiness.

Delaney caught a denim clad arm and rolled the body face up. At sight of the seamed, bearded countenance, he emitted a startled grunt and dropped to one knee to roll up a sleeve and examine the forearm closely. "Well, what do you make of it?" he asked, as he came erect again, after a quick look at the other arm.

Ed twisted a long, spiraling mustache end between thumb and finger, his sallow face profoundly thoughtful. "Looks to me like that there hombre is somewhat dead," he announced judiciously. "Furdermorely, I'm deducin' that he was kilt by a leaden bullet, propelled from a gun by powder which was exploded by the malicious an' illegal act of a—"

"Never mind the formal indictment," Delaney cut him off. "What I'm trying to figure out is how to spot the feller that shot him."

A loose rock, lightly blood-flecked, lay near the man's head. Delaney kicked it and looked under it. "Find the feller?" Ed asked interestedly.

Ignoring the remark, Delaney picked the rock up and tossed it over the rim into the depths of the canyon, then turned back to the body, exploring the pockets with quick fingers.

A wallet with a crumpled wad of small bills and a few coins, pipe and tobacco, pocket comb, stub pencil, a sweat-soiled bandanna, a battered silver watch with a tarnished elkhead fob. That was all. "Stumps me," Delaney confessed, glumly.

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"I just can't figure what we ought to do next."

"Point our hawses' noses down the trail an' their tails toward that carcass an' ride," Ed decided promptly. "Of course, we're gonna git kilt right here on th' Rio Grandy. Never has been no question in my mind 'bout that since we started out on this damnfool expydition. But we might as well postpone our double funeral as long as possible. Th' way to do that is to ooze on' bout our bizness an' not try to cover too much terrytory. We got one mess on our hands awready. No use to horn in on another 'un."

Delaney shook his sandy head. "You're a good feller, Ed; but you got a bad habit of letting your mind rest while you talk. We're setting in on this—and setting in hard. Back that hawse off a little so I can look this ground over. Something bogus about this layout and I wanta—"

"Look-ee here," Ed sputtered, as he backed Whitey obediently. "Either yuh're loco or I am. I may be some prejudiced about it, but I don't think I'm the lunatic. Mind answerin' a few simple questions?"

Delaney started in an ever-widening circle, walking slowly, stopping to eye the rocky ground narrowly. "Go ahead and shoot those important questions. I'll talk as I work."

"Shootin'. First I'll outline the situation, so's yuh'll remember it, mebbe. C'reckt me if I go wrong.

"Yuh're name's Dan Delaney, an' when yuh was in yur right mind yuh was sheriff of the best damn cow-country in western Neebrasky, an' I was yur depitty. Right?"

"Right."

"Then yuh got ketched with a bad attack of the ringtail or somethin' an' dragged me off down here to Texas to jine up with the Rangers. Right?"

"Right. The Rangers are a great body of men, and I'm proud of 'em."

"I ain't. I'm admittin' that they gotta reputation as fighters, but they ain't got no sense or judgment."

"How come?"

"'Cause, right off the reel, they made yuh a sergeant, an' listed me as a rear-rank private. Lack of discrimination like that there condemns them rannies at headquarters as a bunch of jugheads plumb hopeless an' onredeemable.

"Passin' that as settled, we'll proceed with our story. Stop me if yuh see a good joke anywheres in it. I wanta laugh when yuh do."

ED PAUSED to hook a lean leg over the horn and lace up an unpresentable cigarette. Having lighted it, he watched Delaney tramp about and proceeded:

"Then Ol' Whiskers, head jughead at headquarters, sent us out on our first job, which same was to foller a guy named Hank Beeler, who used to rustle an' slit throats with a gang up on the Red River, an' who was supposed to be oozin' down here to meet his ol' boss, who made a gitaway a year or two ago, after killin' a assortment of citizens, includin' his own wife an' the sheriff. Four-five other renygades of the Red River gang eloped with their boss, an' are with him now, presumable. Right?"

"Right—and what of it?"

"Well, we took in on this Beeler's trail an' stuck to it like two calves on a tit. Follered him fur six hundred miles, keepin' behind far enough so he didn't know it. We didn't know precise where he was goin', but we did know we was goin' wherever he was, an' that the gang'd be there.

"Bein' plumb jugheads, the headquarters chair-riders had give us a sketchy description of Beeler, but none of Black Jack Stone, the geezer Beeler was goin' to meet somewheres."

"That was an unfortunate oversight," Delaney admitted as he ceased circling and returned to stand thoughtfully by the body. "Headquarters simply forgot that we were new men in Texas, and

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never had heard of Black Jack Stone. When we opened our sealed orders at Tres Hidalgos a week ago, we found that we were to trail this Beeler till he met up with Black Jack—which the department was certain he would do. Then, we were to—are to—grab the bunch of 'em. That seems clear and direct enough."

"Yeh. That's jus' what I say. An' bein's it's clear as red mud an' direct as a mouse's trail why don't we foller that order? We know Beeler's only a few hours ahead of us? Why don't we go on an' git him?"

Delaney shook his head again. "You're hopeless, Ed. Hell, haven't you tumbled to the situation yet?" He pointed to the body. *"That's* Beeler.

"If you'll slide down and have a look, you'll see that little tattoo mark on his left forearm, and the crescent scar across the right biceps."

"Gallopin' lizards!" Ed exploded "Now we *are* in one hell of a fix! Beeler never will meet up with Black Jack, so we can't—"

"I reckon he *has* met up with Black Jack," Delaney deduced quietly. "I don't know who else would kill him and plant him here."

Ed swung down, interested in the body for the first time. "Yuh don't mean——"

"Yeh. He was shot somewhere else, and dumped here." Delaney stooped and opened the flannel shirt. "See, the heart was shot right out of him at close quarters. He must have bled a lot, but there's practically no blood on the rocks here. Also, though he's been dead for several hours, the dew was off when the body was placed here—perhaps an hour ago, not more."

Ed was puzzled. "But why would Black Jack up an'——"

"I'm afraid I know the answer," Delaney cut in soberly. "The department took a lot of precautions against a leak, but there must have been one. Black Jack knew Beeler was being trailed, so he killed him on sight, planting the body here to make it look like *we* had shot him.

"That means also that Black Jack has our numbers, though we haven't the slightest idea of his identity—can't get an idea until we ferret one out ourselves, as we have strict orders not to try to communicate with headquarters until we've nabbed our man.

"Looks like a tight situation for us."

"Fur you, not fur me," Ed declared hastily, as he strode toward his horse. "I'm headin' back for ol' Neebrasky. The climate up there 'grees with me, fine an' dandy."

DELANEY smiled amusedly as Ed heaved his lank form into saddle and started Whitey on a jerky jog back down the trail. Delaney had rolled and lighted a cigarette and was leading sorrel Dick toward the body when Whitey shuffled into sight again, Ed dismounting with a helpless sigh. "Jus' happent to recollek' that I promised yur wife an' yur maw that I'd look after locoed little Dannie so long's they was life in me, an'—"

"All right, then. Give me a lift with this poor cuss' body."

Ed sighed dolefully again. "Bound to keep monkeyin' aroun' here till Black Jack spots us an'—"

"Shed off the mourning," Delaney snapped. "It's amusing enough, but it gets tiresome. Besides we got to hustle.

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There'll be a town around here somewhere, and that town'll be Black Jack's headquarters. We want to hit it before night."

"Yeh, we'll hit the town 'fore night, an' the town'll hit us 'fore mornin'," Ed predicted resignedly, as they lifted Beeler's body into Delaney's saddle.

AFTER they had lowered the body into a deep rock crevasse on the far slope of a knoll to westward, they covered it deeply with loose rock, dribbled dead cedar spines down upon the whole and removed every sign of their work. Going and coming from the place, they kept on the hard footing and when they returned to the trail, half-a-mile north of where they had left it, Delaney was satisfied that not a sign of the tragedy had been left.

Jogging northward along the white, sun-glared bridlepath, the two found that it soon took to a wide ledge that dipped toward the rubble-strewn floor of the canyon. Just before they reached the lower level, Delaney pointed a gauntleted hand toward a lone rider stationary among the dancing heat imps a quarter of a mile up the big slash. "What do you think of that?"

"Looks like a man on a hawse," Ed ruled, squinting sagely. "Seems like he's turned the front end of said animal this way an' started it to movin'."

"Yeh. He's been waiting for us to show up. Now he's coming to have a look."

"Look fur what?"

"The *corpus delicti*. Quite a nice little plant, eh? Two strangers show on the trail. This galoot rides in the direction from which they just came and finds the body of a murdered man — only he doesn't, in this particular case."

"I gotta half notion to take a poke at 'im," Ed growled, glaring at the approaching rider.

"I got the same inclination," Delaney said. "We'll have to postpone it though, and act plumb sweet and guileless. You see, that fellow either is Black Jack Stone, or someone who works with him or for him. I'm going to be plumb glad to meet him—so glad that I'm going to make it my business to get real well acquainted with him.

"You act dumb and let me do the talking. This is ticklish business."

"Yeh, ticklish business; but it don't tickle me plumb pink," Ed grumbled. He jerked his shaggy head toward three other men who had appeared beyond the first. They had rifles across their laps and were coming down the canyon at a keen gallop. "Them rannies acts as though they intend to round us up."

"Sit tight," Delaney ordered out of the corner of his mouth, as the first rider came within talking distance.

He was squat, swarthy, slovenly in dress, dust encased from a long ride. He had an enormous beaked nose, small, close-set eyes and a square, loose mouth with thick lips that failed to hide the double row of tartered teeth. His big gray hat, sweaty at the band, was tilted low, and from under its flopped brim the ferret eyes were appraising the Rangers closely as he veered his wiry powderface cayuse to pass.

That didn't suit Delaney. The other three were coming on fast. If there was to be trouble, he wanted to have the four of them at his front. He reined Dick left and held up a hand. When the other stopped, he stooped also, Ed halting behind him.

"Howdy, stranger," Delaney greeted amiably.

"'Lo. Somethin' yuh wanted?" The fellow's manner was forbiddingly sullen and ungracious.

Delaney chose to overlook that. "Yeh. We're some saddle weary. If there's a town anywhere around here, we want to hit it."

The big-nosed man jerked his unkempt

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head toward the three who now had ridden up. "Ast them fellers. I'm in a kinda rush." He spurred the powderface into a gallop and went on.

Delaney turned to the three, who had drawn up in a half-circle, rifles across their knees. He experienced a mild shock when he saw that one of them, a big, dark man with powerful shoulders and a face like a knife, wore a sheriff's star on his suspender. He spoke first and with blunt directness. "You geezers ridin' fur?"

"Maybe so, maybe not," Delaney answered casually. "We're looking for a likely location for a horse spread, and we're riding till we find it. Right now, we want to hit a town and rest and feed up a little."

The sheriff nodded. "Awright. The town of *Dos Fresnos* lays over northeast a little ways. We're goin' in after a bit. Yuh kin stick here an' go in with us."

It was fully as much an order as a suggestion, but Delaney chose not to view it that way. "Right decent of you, Mister," he smiled. "Makes a stranger feel good to have someone pay a little attention to him."

"Yuh fellers come by the upper trail?" the sheriff asked, with overdue casualness.

DELANEY was equally casual. "Yeh. We like to got splay-eyed looking for a town without finding any."

The sheriff frowned thoughtfully at his horse's ears, then shot another question. "Did yuh see any sign of trouble up that way?"

"No. Why? You out after somebody?"

The sheriff's keen eyes left his bronc's ears to focus on Delaney's guileless face. "I'm Jim Burgess, sheriff here. We're just out on the prowl," he explained after a time. "Lotta rustlin' goin' on, an' we hafta keep our eyes peeled.

"Nosey'll look things over up there an' come back an' report. He rides fur the Kitestick outfit over east of here."

Within the next three minutes, Delaney made mental note of two important facts. The sheriff didn't "prowl." Simply sat his horse and waited. When the puncher called Nosey reappeared, he came down the slanted trail as fast as the powderface could travel. When he pulled up and looked at the sheriff, both appeared greatly puzzled.

"See anything?" the big officer almost snapped.

Nosey spat disgustedly. "Not a damn thing. Not any damn thing whatever."

The sheriff sat silent in saddle for a time, slapping his bootleg abstractedly with a whangleather rein-end. "C'mon," he said, after a while, then wheeled his big red roan and shook him into a jog.

Riding a little way behind the four of them, Delaney whispered to Ed Castor. "Still ticklish. Nosey and that big sheriff expected to find Beeler's body up there. It may mean that Burgess is Black Jack Stone."

"Reckon he's hazin' us to the calaboose?" Ed asked, scowling.

"Can't tell."

"If he does try that, what'll we do?"

Delaney's jaws clicked. "Shoot it out with 'em, if they start anything like that today or tomorrow or any other day. If we have to go down, I want it to be with our eyes open and our boots on and our guns blazing. No jail-and-rope stuff goes."

THE trail crossed the floor of the canyon, zig-zagged up the east wall, slanted across a bunchgrass plain to enter *Dos Fresnos*, a drab cowtown of adobe structures nestling against a knoll that was surmounted by a rocky shaft. There was a combination hotel and saloon, a smithy, a bootmaker's shop, a drugstore, a feedlot and a low-walled structure that Delaney assumed was the courthouse and jail.

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Delaney watched Sheriff Burgess closely as they entered the sun-baked business street. If he went on about his business, all well and good; if he——

"Put yur broncs in the lot," Burgess said, waving a hand to indicate the place. He turned in saddle to face Delaney squarely as he added, "An' leave 'em there till I say when an' what."

"Just as you say," Delaney came back easily—"that is, so long as your 'when and what' agree with our wishes and intentions."

Burgess stopped, reined his horse around, fiddling with the reins as he appraised the Rangers scowlingly. "Put them cayuses in that there feedlot," he repeated, gruffly. "Leave 'em there till I say when an' what. If yuh make a move to leave town 'fore I give yuh the nod, I'll chuck yuh in jail quicker'n a calf can shake its tail twicet."

"We're puttin' the hawses up," Delaney assured him. "As for the rest, we'll see what we see when we see it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeh."

The two locked glances, the sheriff scowling till his heavy brows screened his muddy eyes; Delaney with chin thrust out aggressively. The officer finally shrugged his massive shoulders and rode off with his three friends.

"Can't I call 'im a son, with trimmin's, jus' oncet?" Ed Castor inquired beseechingly.

"Not now," Delaney denied him, "but I don't believe it will be long till you can call him anything you want to—if you ain't choked on powdersmoke.

"You see, Ed, we have strict orders not to announce ourselves as Rangers till we get ready to lay hands on our man. We don't know who our man is, but he probably has the town with him. That means that we're in a snake den, with the snakes ready to strike at any instant, and from anywhere.

"That leaves us but one play. We got to keep our eyes peeled and our mouths shut, and shoot when the grass wiggles."

"Yuh're overlookin' one thing, which is that I'm just a little bit snaky myself, when it comes to a showdown," Ed offered, as they turned into the feedlot. "I'm gonna slide aroun' this man's town on my belly an' stick my stinger inta the first galoot that tromps on me. I'm hopin' it's that lop-eared sheriff."

II

SNAKE'S DEN

THROUGHOUT the day, the two Rangers loitered about the hoof-pocked streets of *Dos Fresnos,* finding its lazy lethargy far different from the atmosphere of the bustling, rollicking cow-town to which they had been accustomed. The Mexican population kept to their own quarters; the few whites loafed and drank moderately at the *Casa Blanca,* the combination saloon, cafe, gambling house and dance hall. The Rangers joined this bunch, loafed with them, drank with them. There was nowhere else to loaf, nothing else to do. When night fell and a dozen or so of ranchers and punchers dribbled in from the mesquite flats to eastward and northward, and joined the townsmen already assembled at the *Casa Blanca,* Delaney sat at a table in an obscure corner, eying each individual closely. As well as he knew anything at all, he knew that his man was in that low-ceiled, booze-heavy room. But which?

As the appellation "Black Jack" suggested, Delaney was looking for a swarthy, dark-haired man. That appeared to eliminate Simmonds, owner of the Kitestick, Nosey's boss, and Delaney's first suspect. Delaney met him and found that he was jovial, easy going, blue-eyed and decidedly red-haired. Burgess, the big sheriff was a distinct suspect; so was Lainson, a swarthy, scowling-faced deputy sheriff who drank heavily throughout

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the day, and twice sought to pump Delaney as to his past and prospective movements. Another was a full-faced, pouchy-eyed lawyer named Pullen who asked no questions, but spent the better part of his afternoon eying the Rangers aslant.

The exasperating feature of the situation was that Delaney knew that, whoever he was, subtle Black Jack Stone knew that the two were Rangers. The trap he had set for them proved that conclusively. It was like engaging in a duel, standing in a strong light, with your opponent hidden somewhere in the neighborhood, ready to strike when conditions grew favorable. No wonder Ed Castor had kissed faithful old Whitey good-by after feeding him an extra ration of oats at sundown.

At Delaney's request, Moon, the shrimpy little proprietor-barkeep of the *Casa Blanca* had their suppers served at a table in a rear corner. They had scarcely seated themselves when a blind old Mexican started to playing soulful Spanish music on a violin, and a hollow-faced youth, who obviously was his son, accompanied on the tinny-toned piano. Three dancing girls filed down the stairway that led from the upper story, the first of them being a voluptuous blonde, who evidently was popular about the place. She stopped at the bar for a friendly glass of wine with smiling Moon. She clipped Burgess playfully on the shoulder when she passed where he was lolling against the bar, sipping beer. She chucked the red-haired rancher Simmonds under the chin as he lined up beside the sheriff. Both men grinned at her, and Simmonds laughed uproariously at something she said to him. Then, to Delaney's mild surprise, she turned away from the bar and walked straight toward the table where the Rangers were seated. "Remember," he whispered hurriedly to Ed, "the female of the species is far more dangerous than the male. No philandering goes, tonight."

DELANEY had expected the usual dancehall girl's approach—giggling, ogling and the suggestion that the prospect buy a drink. Instead, and despite the fact that she obviously had had more than one drink, she maintained a certain stately poise that became her well, and spoke in a cultured, well modulated voice as she stopped beside their table.

"Pardon, gentlemen, but I am a hostess, and you are strangers. Are your wants being well supplied?"

"Yeh," grunted Ed Castor, bent over the coffee the barefoot Mexican table boy had brought. Ed appeared afraid to look at her for fear of encouraging her.

Subtle as her approach had been, Delaney still knew that it was an approach, and he knew how to disarm her. Rising, he bowed with studious politeness. "We are doing very well, thank you. We'll call on you in case we feel neglected."

She smiled coyly and fluttered long, ebon lashes at him. "Sounds awfully like a dismissal," she sighed, whimsically, then sank into the chair he was practically forced to place for her. "I suppose you're a staid married man, fearful of becoming enchanted."

"Married, but not at all uneasy about becoming enchanted," he told her so unconcernedly that she shrugged her shapely shoulders and turned to wooden-faced Ed, who had commenced eating noisily.

The long lashes fluttered again and the

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deep violet eyes focused on him almost pathetically. "And you? Are you married, also?"

"Yeh."

"And friend wife is amiable?"

"Yeh. Yuh never seen anybody more amiablier than that woman is when she's pettin' 'er cat."

"The sweet voiced type, eh?"

"Yeh. When 'er canary bird gits to singin' an' she talks to it, you can't tell which is which."

Her silvery laugh belled out. "Poor man! I note that she pets the cat and the bird. How about *you?* Perhaps that's the reason why you're away from home right now, eating what you can find, and in a strange place."

"Good chuck," Ed observed. "A hungry feller don't want nothin' better than potatoes an' aigs an'—"

She held up her shapely hands deprecatingly, and inched her chair toward him. "You spoke of the potatoes and eggs. Bah! Potatoes and eggs as they appear in cafés, the world over!"

She inched the chair again, and Delaney thought she was doing a little fancy footwork under the table. "Potatoes and eggs, just slapped on platters like feed in a horse's manger.

"Now, if *I* were cooking for you, I'd boil and mash the potatoes, then make a little nest of the mashed potatoes and brown it in the oven. Then I'd butter the nest lightly and drop an egg into it and—"

"*Hen's* aigs is good that way, too," Ed remarked ingenuously.

The woman came out of her chair, her face flaming, her voice cracking under the strain of her anger. "Oh, smart guys, eh? Giving me the ha-ha, eh?

"Well, I'll tell the pair of you that you won't feel so smart and you won't ha-ha so damn much in a few hours, now! You don't know it, but you're nicely snared, right now, and before morning you'll be fixed so you won't—"

TROTTING from behind the bar with incredible swiftness, little Moon had caught the woman's arm, jerking it savagely to get her attention. "Cut that out," he ordered brusquely. "Hell, you better quit drinking if a glass or two is going to set you up so you shoot off your mouth like that!"

Burgess came striding over to scowl at her, and advise her to "cool off and be herself or git out."

Still showing his easy-going smile, Simmonds came strolling up to intervene also. "Don't know what th' rukus is about, but I reckon yuh tried to josh these fellers and got joshed a little yurself," he guessed shrewdly. "Yuh're gittin' to be a reg'lar hellcat, Mayme."

"Yeh, an' she's hellcatted around here about all she's gonna," Moon stated bluntly. "Every time she gits her snoot full she starts trouble. That don't go in this place any more. If you can't take care of her, I can, Burgess."

"Needn't c'mence givin' me no orders," the sheriff flared so heatedly that the little proprietor let go the woman's arm and slunk back toward the bar. Burgess caught her shoulder and gave her a light shove toward the stairway. "Better go up an' take a nap. Yuh'll feel better when yuh git straightened out."

"Straightened out, hell!" she fairly screamed, wrenching away from him. "I'll straighten somebody out before this thing's done with!

"Sure thing I'll go upstairs! Damn glad to get away from a mealy-mouthed bunch that will let a pair of big-headed outsiders come in and give me the laugh!

"Sure, I'm going upstairs—long enough to pack my clothes! To hell with all of you! I'll make somebody sweat for this!"

After Mayme had stamped up the stairway, Delaney finished his meal in a more contented mood. "It's the first break we've had — and sweet heaven knows we need one," he said to Ed. "Whoever Black Jack Stone is, he shoved

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that woman at us. Now she's turned on him. The police make a lot of claims, but ninety percent of the criminals are caught because their women get sore, and turn them in.

"I want you to loaf at this table, Ed. Need you right here if anything breaks. I see they're starting a poker game, and I'm going to set in, after a while. Don't drink too much—just enough to excuse your sitting here."

Burgess, Simmonds, Nosey and a fat, iron-gray rancher were seating themselves around a baize-covered table by the stairway, where Moon was depositing chips and a pack of cards. Delaney straddled a chair as if it were a horse, fashioned a cigarette and watched while they opened the game—dollar jackpots, table stakes. Though he seemed to be merely an idle spectator, the Ranger really was concentrating, watching every movement, every facial expression, hearing and noting every syllable they uttered.

The game which Delaney soon saw was on the level, dragged at the outset; then, with Nosey dealing, the fat rancher opened for the customary five dollars, Burgess staying. Sitting next to the dealer, Simmonds shoved in a small stack. "Cost you five more to draw cards."

The fat rancher studied for a time, then met the raise. "Layin' my two little pairs down," Burgess announced.

"By me," said Nosey.

The fat rancher drew two cards. "I'll play these," Simmonds told them.

THE fat rancher shoved the dollars into the center. Simmonds grinned and shoved in a stack of blues. "Raisin' yuh a even hundred."

"Beats my little tens all to hell," the fat rancher sighed, facing his hand. Simmonds' grin broadened as he raked in the pot without showing his own cards.

The game proceeded, Simmonds winning steadily, being in on almost every play. Burgess broke about even, Nosey and the fat rancher being the losers. Finally, after again laying down his hand under pressure from Simmonds, the fat rancher shoved his chair back. "Whew! I'm sweatin'—believe I'll go git a little open air. May change my luck." He looked at the little pile of white chips at his elbow and grinned at Delaney. "Want to take 'em an' see if yuh kin nurse 'em inta something worthwhile, Stranger?"

Things couldn't have broken better. Delaney had a theory that he wanted to test, and here was his opportunity to enter the game in a natural way. He dropped a wad of bills beside the little heap of chips and took the chair the rancher had vacated.

The game dragged again. Delaney opened a pot, dropping out when two stayed and he didn't help his pair of queens. He hid again when Nosey opened and Burgess bet him under the table.

Then business picked up with a rush. Burgess opened. Sitting next, Delaney stayed, as did Simmonds. Delaney drew two. Simmonds grinned cheerfully and stood pat. Burgess slid two off the deck for himself, then bet five without looking at them. Delaney looked at his two and called the bet. "Well, I see I gotta wake yuh sleepy geezers up again," Simmonds grinned, counting chips and slipping them to the center. "I'm raisin' yuh two hundred."

"Damn," Burgess grunted, flipping his cards face up. "Three little jacks fur openers, an' they went an' got themselves drowneded."

Delaney was counting bills and watching Simmonds' face keenly from beneath slanted hat-brim. He shoved the wad in, stacking the checks on the currency. "Seeing yuh. What you got?"

"That's good," Simmonds told him, with a crestfallen grin. "Yuh shore made me bump my nose that time, feller. Mind lettin' a feller see yur cards?"

"You didn't pay to see 'em, but I'm an

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amiable cuss," Delaney told him, turning the cards over. There was a pair of sixes and the ace he had held with them as a sider.

"Damn," Burgess grunted again. "I had that beat all to hell, but he got the mazuma."

"I had it beat, too," Simmonds grinned wryly. "I actually did have a pair of eights. Riffle the cards, feller. I'm gonna git that back on yuh, or eat the deck."

But the game lagged again, everybody being wary. The sultry night punished the players. Simmonds dropped out for a hand or two, strolled off somewhere. Shortly after he came back, Burgess was called away by Lainson, the deputy, and was out for a couple of hands.

Then Nosey went broke and became a spectator, cursing his luck in a loud voice.

Ed Castor called from where he still was seated at table, "Hey, Pard! Ain't it 'bout time we bedded down somewheres?"

Delaney looked at the clock over the bar. The girl had crowed that something was to happen "before morning." It was almost midnight. Might as well start to leave the place, and see what happened.

He pocketed the goodly pile of currency at his elbow and shoved his small stack of white checks into the center. "What do you say, boys? One more pot—showdown for the size of that pile?"

"Suits me," agreed Simmonds. "Of course I'd ruther play open so's to give me a chanct to git even with yuh fur that trimmin' yuh handed me."

"Gittin' some chair-galded myself," Burgess remarked, yawning. "Let's play the hand an' close the damn game up. Seems like I cain't neither win nor lose nothin', or—"

The sheriff grasped the edge of the table and slowly levered his big body erect, when the barefoot potboy came running in from the rear, ashen-faced, panting.

"Thee señorita! She is *muerta!* She iss what you call dead out there!"

"Who's dead out where?" the big sheriff roared so loudly that the kerosene

bracket lamp on the wall beside him blinked.

"Thee señorita May-me!" the trembling youth yammered, rolling his dark eyes wildly. "Shee iss hang on thee bal-co-nee, *muerta*—very dead!"

III

STONE

THERE was a general rush for the stairway, nimble little Moon darting from behind the bar to lead the way. Delaney started to join the others, then changed his mind and went out through the rear door. Ed Castor heaved out of his chair to join him, reseating himself, obedient as a well-trained hound, when Delaney waved him back.

The rear of the place was a sort of patio, the wall being thick but not high. Running across the upper story was a narrow, latticed balcony, supported by massive wrought iron brackets. As he was emerging from under it, Delaney caught his breath and braked to a stop when he almost collided with a filmy swaying figure.

It was the girl, Mayme. Delaney was puzzled by her posture, for a fleeting instant, then he saw that a length of what appeared to be sash cord was looped

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about her throat, the other end being fastened to the rail of the balcony. The face, clearly outlined in the brilliant moonlight registered neither fear nor suffering nor anger. Instead, it was peaceful, reposeful—even merry.

The balcony overhead swayed to trampling feet and a jumble of excited voices wafted down as Delaney caught the swaying body, heaved up on it, jerked out his jack-knife and slashed the rope. The sheriff's bull voice rose above the others. "Lug 'er inside, feller! Go git Doc Fuller, Nosey!"

"Can't do it," Nosey's gruff tones answered. "Doc's gone to Del Rio to the medical 'sociation meetin'."

"No use anyway. She's dead," Delaney told them.

"Lug 'er over to Doc's place then," Simmonds rumbled as he came lumbering down the stair. "Bust in th' door an' put 'er in a coffin. We'll bury 'er at daylight."

The other two dance girls helped Delaney ease the body to the folding cot Moon brought down with him. There was a hot bustle to take her away, but Delaney took no part in it, knowing that the girl was beyond earthly aid. For as he laid her head on the cot, he discovered that the skull had been crushed in just above and to the rear of the left ear. There was no blood and only the slightest abrasion of the scalp. The cavity was small, deep, and almost perfectly round. The ripple of her thick blonde hair screened it perfectly when she had been laid face upward on the cot.

"Who'da thunk she'd up an' hung 'erself?" Burgess said, a little awed, as they carried the cot away.

"It's a hell of a note to have a thing like that happen," Simmonds contributed, shaking his head despondently.

"Yeh, it's a hell of a note to have a thing like that happen," little Moon agreed, a little sullenly, then suddenly blazed to white heat and spanked the oak bar with his palms as he almost shrieked, "It's a hell of a note to have a *thing* like that happen, more especially as it happened here.

"I'm tellin' the world that this ain't no morgue, an' I'm gittin' plumb fed up on this kinda business. That's the third time in six weeks somebody's got beefed in my place an' I—"

"Hush yer yowlin' an' ketch holt of yurself," Burgess interposed. "It's tough, but nobody's blamin' you, so they's no use sqawkin'."

"Awright, I'll hush," Moon agreed in a voice that still shook slightly. "I'm standin' by what I said, though. Things is gonna change up aroun' here, or I'm gonna—"

"To hell with all that," Simmonds cut in impatiently. "Mayme up an' hung 'erself. It was a damn fool stunt, but we gotta bury 'er decent." He threw a bill on the bar. "There's my ante. Rest of yuh geezers sweeten the pot."

AFTER Burgess had gathered the collection, Moon's sordid place quieted almost to normalcy. Simmonds bought a round of drinks, good-naturedly insisting that Delaney and Ed partake. He, Lawyer Pullen and Lainson revived the poker game, Nosey setting in, after borrowing a small stake from Moon. Everything about the room looked serene, but Delaney knew that it was a false serenity. The girl had talked too much, and had been killed. Her man had killed her. Who was her man? Every person in the room excepting Delaney, Ed and Moon had been back in the patio at least once. Any one of them could easily have ascended to the balcony by climbing the iron brackets. One of them —Black Jack Stone—had done the deed. She had been killed without a struggle—probably never knew what struck her. That was because her murderer was someone whose entrance into her room would cause her no alarm or displeasure.

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Her man was Black Jack Stone. Delaney clicked his teeth on the thought that the unknown bandit was taking his time, toying with the two rangers, catlike, sure that they couldn't get away from him.

Delaney also clicked his teeth on a decision. He had a theory—little more than a hunch—and he was going to act on it. He eased up to where Ed Castor still sat, dutifully watchful. "The break's coming," he whispered. "Keep your sixes in your lap and jump for that nook by the icebox when things crack wide open. Watch Moon. He'll be behind me. I'll try to keep track of the others."

"Good-by," Ed whispered dolefully as Delaney turned away. "Yuh was a hell of a good feller while yuh lasted."

Burgess was up front, lolling against the cigar case, obviously engrossed in his own thoughts, which as obviously were anything but pleasant. He scowled questioningly when Delaney walked straight up to him and said briskly, "I want to ask you a few questions, Burgess."

"Huh," the big sheriff grunted, fixing his muddy eyes on the tall ranger. "Astin' questions an' gittin' 'em answered is two diff'rent things."

"Anyway, I'm asking them." Delaney locked glances with him. "What made you think there had been trouble over there by the canyon, this morning?"

It was a blunt, direct assault on the officer's composure if he were Black Jack. It didn't feaze him. Delaney watched his furrowed face closely as, after considering for a time, he answered, a bit resentfully, "Ain't none of yur damn business as I kin see. Howsomever, I don't mind tellin' yuh. Reason I thought they'd been trouble over there was somebody had phoned in sayin' that they'd been some shootin' thereabouts."

"Who phoned that word?"

"Dunno. Th' jasper wouldn't give 'is name."

"Phone it to you, personally?"

"Naw. Lainson was in the office an' got the message."

"Thought so. Well, I got one more question."

"Shoot."

"Ever hear of Hank Beeler?"

WITH Delaney watching his heavy face intently, the sheriff frowned thoughtfully over the question for a time, then shook his head in self deprecation. "Gittin' kinda forgitful, I reckon. I've knowed a Beeler somewheres, but I cain't say whether 'is t'other name was Hank or Bill—seems like it was Bill."

Burgess looked a bit startled when Delaney clapped him heartily on the shoulder and extended a hand. "You're all right, Burgess, I'm damned glad to say."

Burgess accepted the hand none too enthusiastically, still a little bit puzzled. "Glad yuh give me the O.K.," he said dryly.

"Fact is, though, yuh're the jasper that's a question mark—yuh an' that shitepoke pard of yours. I know I'm awright. Are *you?* If yuh are, tell me who the humped up hell yuh are an' what yuh're doin' aroun' here."

"Got any reason to suspect us?"

"Yeh. I'm suspectin' ev'ry human I see runnin' loose, unbranded. Plenty devilment goin' on in this man's town—robbin's, an' shootin's an' blackjackin's, an'—"

"Eh?"

Delaney's surprised grunt stilled the officer's tongue and set him frowning in puzzlement again. The frown deepened when Delaney chuckled delightedly as a great light swept into his mind. "Stay right where you are for one minute more, Burgess," he chortled. If I ain't badly off my guess, I'll show you your head crook in no time, now. Watch out for gunplay!

"And another thing, Burgess. While

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you're watching, keep one eye on that hog faced deputy of yours."

"Hell! Yuh mean that Lainson's a—"

"Yeh! Better just keep out of this till you know who's who and what's what. I think my pard and I can handle it."

"But I don't know yuh, an'—"

"I'm Ranger-Sergeant Dan Delaney. That's Ranger Castor, over there. Better keep out. He doesn't like you a bit, and he'll plug you if you make a move."

"But I'm sheriff here, an'—"

"Suit yourself. It's your funeral—and there'll sure be one if you draw cards in this game."

WITH Burgess gaping after him, Delaney strolled down the room, noting out of the corner of his eye that Ed Castor had been watching the bit of byplay, and that his somber face had taken on an unholy gleam of battle-lust. Delaney smiled at the sight. Good old Ed. Always grumbling and predicting disaster, but always really pining for a fight and nothing short of a whirlwind when in one.

Simmonds looked up and showed his genial grin when Delaney stopped at his elbow to say carelessly, "I'm a stranger here, and am looking for a feller. I asked Burgess about him, and he didn't know him. Maybe you do."

"Glad to oblige," Simmonds smiled. "What's the geezer's name?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, there's a pair of them. I figure that when I find one, I'll find the other." Delaney walked around the corner of the table to face the rancher squarely as he said, deliberately. "One of them is Hank Beeler."

Simmonds shook his red head in decided negative. "Never heard tell of no galoot with that handle."

"And the other one is Blackjack Stone," Delaney went on, tensing himself for the explosion he felt would follow. "Not Black *Jack*, understand, but Blackjack—all one word. I believe he's so called because he often kills with a blackjack instead of with a gun. As he killed Mayme, for instance, then roped her and threw her over the rail to make it look like suicide.

"Really, Blackjack is ruddy-complexioned and red headed, I believe.

"Know him, do you?"

A heavy silence clamped down over the booze-heavy room while the speck-faced clock above the backbar stolidly ticked off a dozen dragging seconds. Then Simmonds grinned whimsically, yawned, stretched lazily. When his hand came back down, the right one struck at his hip as his body snapped erect.

But Delaney already had placed a hand on the table and vaulted it, drawing in mid-air. His six came down with a short, chopping motion as they came breast to breast.

The butt thudded home on Simmonds' temple and he toppled, sprawled backward, his spurred heels drumming loudly on the sanded floor as his body writhed convulsively.

Chairs kicked back all about the baize-covered table as Pullen, Nosey, Lainson leaped up and drew. Up front, Moon's slippered feet pattered as he trotted nimbly to the shelf below the cash register where his heavy six lay.

Despite Delaney's warning, Burgess roared out a lurid string of oaths and started to join the fracas. Before he had taken the second step there was a

roaring report of old black powder in the corner where Ed Castor now was on his feet, sounding what might have

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been called a delighted warwhoop. In that same second, hurtling lead sang and hissed and criss-crossed through the growing haze about the poker table.

As Delaney side-stepped away from the table to get the gunmen there all in his front, he heard Burgess' six clatter to the floor followed by the thud of his big body, and the tinkle of falling glass where he had crashed against the cigar case.

ALL that was in the first half of a split catwink. In that same fleeting instant, Delaney saw the big deputy's gun flash on a level, and he took a lightning snapshot at the heaving paunch behind it.

As Deputy Lainson collapsed, coughing hoarsely, a slug hummed from up front, paralyzing Delaney's gun arm, and starting a warm trickle down his sleeve. As he drew his left-hand six he was relieved to hear Ed Castor's heavy gun blare again, followed by a ratlike squeal from little Moon's excitement-constricted throat.

Slower than the others, Nosey and Pullen were in now. Grating his teeth against the almost dizzying pain in his arm, Delaney snapped a slug, then another into Nosey's heaving chest and the puncher pitched forward and draped his big body over the table.

Delaney turned his six on Pullen, but the pouchy faced lawyer dropped his gun and raised his hands so high that the sight would have been ludicrous under less stressful circumstances.

"All down!" Ed Castor chanted, joyously. "School's out fur the day! Bunged up bad, Danny?"

"Think not, though it hurts like the devil. I'd better wrap it up."

"Take yur time," Ed advised cheerfully. "I'll ride herd on these leaky jaspers, hopin' secret that one of 'em 'll make a bum play so's to give me a excuse fur crimpin' 'im some more."

"Don't include Burgess in that," Delaney requested, chuckling a little weakly as he sat down and started ripping off a sleeve from which to fashion a bandage. "He's our friend, now."

"He may be, but he don't look it," Ed grinned in turn, as the big sheriff came down the room, nursing one shoulder and glaring blackly at Ed. "'Stead of beefin' 'im, I just shook 'im over the pits of hell an' made 'im smell sulphur by creasin' 'is shoulder a little. He don't seem to 'preciate my thoughtful consideration. It may be that I made a miscue somehow, an' will hafta do it all over ag'in."

"'Sall right," Burgess grunted, then looked about the shambleslike room. "Reckon I brung it on myself by hornin' in an' tryin' to help, after bein' warned to lay off. I mighta knowed I was too slow to git anywheres when two sawtoothed cyclones like yuh was cavortin'.

"Hum-m! Moon an' Lainson folded up fur good. Simmonds knocked out, Pullen close-herded till he's hollerin' calf-rope, an' me with a slit shoulder muscle.

"An', after all that, damn if I know exact who is who, what is what or why is why. What I do know is that I'm gonna run from the next damn Ranger I see crookin' 'is gun-arm, hostile-like.

"I've seed some gun-work in my time; but I didn't see your'n. It was too damn fast fur me."

Ed finished bandaging Delaney's arm and was turning his attention to the sheriff's creased shoulder when Simmonds stirred and struggled to rise. Ed nonchalantly kicked him in the head with the heel of his boot and he collapsed again.

"I reckon yuh got the right man," Burgess said between slitted lips as Ed drenched his wound with fiery whisky he had brought from the bar. "What I can't figger out is how yuh got onto 'im."

"Poker savvy," Delaney told him, smilingly. "You see, before I sat into that

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game, I watched all you fellows pretty close. You judged your hands well, but every one of you gave yourselves away when you bluffed.

"For instance, Burgess, you twist your mustache unconsciously when you're trying to make a bobtail flush stand up for you. You're a dead easy mark for an observing player.

"Simmonds was a little tighter, but I finally got onto him. When he was bluffing, the two little dents above his nostrils filled and emptied rapidly under stress of his inner effort to put up a front."

"Yeh, but what the hell's that gotta do with these murders an' sich?"

"Plenty. When a man is bluffing in a card game, he's lying, in a way. It's perfectly legitimate, but he's lying, just the same—trying to make the other fellow think he has something when he hasn't.

"All right then. I knew what you did when you were lying with the cards, and know you would do the same thing if you lied with your tongue. So I asked you if you knew Beeler, and watched to see if you twisted that mustache when you answered. Well, you didn't twist it, so that was that.

"Then I asked Simmonds if he knew Beeler or Blackjack, and when he tried to bluff it out, those telltale dents filled and emptied like the buckets of a chain pump. I knew I had him. It was a simple question asked casually, but it made him shake inside and those dents told on him.

"But after all, Burgess, give yourself a little credit. You mentioned blackjack crimes just in time to give me the tip. Up to then, I had been looking for a blacklike feller, and Simmonds is the opposite type. The second you said 'blackjack' I knew what had made that little round dent in Mayme's skull—which was all I needed to tie Simmonds in. I already was suspicious of him because he was so doggone anxious to get that poor girl's body buried."

Burgess looked enlightened; also, a bit sheepish. "I see yuh got the poker savvy, an' yuh used it good an' plenty." He looked down at Simmonds, who had commenced to stir again, then at Pullen, who had seated himself by the table and was staring morosely at the green cloth. "What yuh gonna do now—carry them two live ones clean up to the Red River fur trial?"

"I'll have to wire for instructions on that. Beeler and the girl were killed in your county, so the department probably will want them left here for trial. It'll be no trick to get the evidence."

"Needn't go to any trouble on my account," Pullen looked up to say slowly. "I know when I'm licked and am ready to turn state's evidence. Moon belonged to Blackjack's Red River gang. Lainson and Nosey and I joined after they came down here. You never would have got onto us if that damned woman hadn't gone on the rampage so Blackjack had to kill her to keep her from talking."

"Anyway, Blackjack had the c'rect system on that," Ed Castor remarked wisely. "That's the only way to keep a ring-tailed female woman from talkin'."

ED leaned down to roll up Simmonds' sleeve and remove the blackjack hung to his wrist by a leather loop. After inspecting it admiringly, he dropped it into his pocket with a complacent air.

"Better leave that with Burgess," Delaney suggested. "He'll be needing it for evidence."

For once, Ed Castor disobeyed, shaking his shaggy head in vigorous negative. "Nope, Danny. I'll be goin' home on furlough pretty soon now. I'll be needin' that little emancipater myself.

"I ain't gonna use it vigorous, right off the reel; but I'm gonna wave it, occasional, an' tell what it's good fur—accordin' to the Simmonds' system."

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The Bow Bend Holdup

by

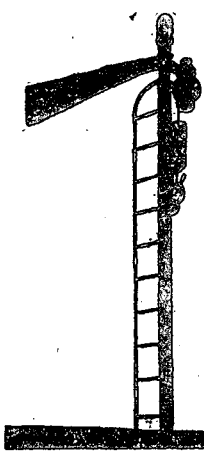
EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

HAVIN' eased her off a little,
We were headin' for the curve—
I'm one hoghead who's contendin'
Recklessness is never nerve—
When somebody growled behind me,
"Slam the punk back of the ear!
Get that shovel-swinger! Sock him!
Holy hell, we're stoppin' here!"

When I came to, me an' Barney—
He's a mighty proper lad,
Were tied up an' in the tender,
Eatin' coal dust, fightin' mad,
While across the crash of bullets
Came a harsh an' sneerin' shout,
"They won't open the express car?
Huh! We'll have to blast 'em out!"

Lord! A loud explosion followed;
Then a yell, "Come grab the stuff!"
"Get them holdups, Tom!" cracked Barney,
"Man, I'd like to call their bluff!
Wouldn't it be satisfyin'
To get busy with my fists?
Glory be!" he choked an' spluttered,
"I'm a-loosenin' my wrists!"

"What a haul?" a bull-voice gloated,
"Shoot off any heads that show!
If them passengers want trouble,
We've got plenty to bestow!
There's none croaked!" An' six masked bandits,
Laughin', climbed into our cab,
Where we watched them, tense an' ready,
With most everything but gab.



With a wrench an' shovel swingin',
We lit into that sextette;
Some surprised, they started shootin',
But they haven't winged us yet;
An', on visitin' the cooler,
If you use both of your eyes,
In the cell block for long-termers
You'll be seein' all them guys.

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When a Private Detective Chances to Witness a Murder. Is That a Break?

POISON PEN

By

ROBERT H. RHODE

Author of "Trailer Trail," "Chinaman's Chance," etc.

AS IT happened—although on a fine point, to be sure, it really wasn't happenstance at all—I was not a thousand miles away that murky night last fall when the sparrow cops found the body with the phony G-man tin cooling in the shrubbery under the grassy rise crowned by Central Park Casino. Not a thousand miles away and not a hundred, either.

The fact is, I was so near by that I still raise gooseflesh at thought of the turn events might have taken if the Homicide Division had ever got wind of my proximity. Quite certainly, I would for one thing have spent the next morning with the Grand Jury instead of at the telephone paging the highways and byways of rural New England for the Mercedes and the Burrs, in which case the best I could possibly have given C. Gifford Jamison would have been very much the worst of it.

I had practically been an eye witness to the killing. If I had been a little closer when the gun banged, or the visibility a little better, I would have seen everything. As it was, I did actually see the flash of the pistol and I crashed through the bushes to find Jamison blank and rooted beside the *corpus delicti*, with the murder weapon smoking at his feet. Red-handed! What but?

The dance band in the Casino was still swinging away, and evidently the death shot had not been heard inside those exclusive walls. But plenty of ears outdoors had been reached. On all sides night sticks were smacking the cement of the Park walls and heavy flat feet pounding.

I grabbed C. Gifford Jamison by the shoulder and whirled him around.

"Skim!" I hissed at him. "Follow me. Snap it!"

He didn't move, though. I couldn't drag him. I had to leave him there or else fall to the gendarmerie myself; and being already not so popular with Lieutenant Joseph Molinelli, the Homicide Division night command, I could not court that.

In the Burr International Detective Agency we have a slogan that has been handed down through three generations of Burrs. A three word slogan—"The Burrs Stick." And we do stick, too. From the Founder's own day on deck, which I would have you know was back before the majority of the G.A.R. had begun to show gray even at the temples, we have never accepted a case where we couldn't see justice on our side, nor let a client down once we took him on. So let me tell you, I felt pretty sick over Jamison.

But putting myself in the bag along with him, I swiftly reasoned, wouldn't

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do him the slightest bit of good. To tell the honest truth I didn't believe then that the Burrs themselves, the Chief with his hair-trigger thinking or Junior with his sleepy omniscience, could help much, either. Not then or for days thereafter. Looking back, I burn up to think that to the minute of that crazy blow-off in the New Acropolis All-Night Lunch I privately saw eye to eye with Joey Molinelli.

I admit it. My perspective was all twisted by what I had seen. Just like Joey, I went for surface appearances. I thought that Daniel Burr, Jr., was whistling in the dark. I didn't believe the Lieutenant could ever be staved off from that collar he was foaming to make. It looked to be in the cards, set and sure and from the copper viewpoint one hundred per cent right.

And I was still of that mind—singing the blues 'way down deep—when I told the hamburger chef to cook mine medium. Absolutely, it wasn't until I saw the Greek turn white and duck behind his counter, and the bouquets of frying onion and burnt gunpowder were suddenly clashing, that I realized the Burrs had saved a day again and that Sweet Child's coming-out party was not doomed to be a bust.

THE dinner dance at the St. Swithin introducing Miss Marcy Ann Jamison to adult Park Avenue was on the social docket for a Friday night. That made our working time very short indeed. We had four days and some odd hours at the outside, for it hadn't been until the preceding Monday that Miss Jamison appeared in the office and took down her hair.

How she found her way there I don't exactly know. She spoke of friends who'd had some diamonds stolen and got them back, but the name she mentioned didn't register and I suspect that as likely as not she had just turned to "Detective Agencies" in the telephone Red Book and closed her eyes woman-wise and jabbed with a pin. That doesn't matter. The important thing is that she came to the Burrs and came in time.

I was sitting in state in the private office, feet up on the Chief's desk, half asleep after waiting all morning and most of the afternoon for the phone to ring, when Miss Cassitt brought in Marcy Ann's small engraved card.

I lowered the extremities and was adjusting the cravat, a very cheery number personally selected for me by Dan Burr, Sr., on his latest shirt-and-tie spree at Bixbee's, when Miss Jamison entered. I kept on adjusting, and I know my eyes must have frogged as I stared.

Once upon a time a bird I believed to be safe in Sing Sing had walked in on me through that same door with a roscoe in his hand and vengeance on his mind. He was a surprise—but not one whit less a surprise was Marcy Ann. Expecting to see a client I saw just a kid. Although as I later learned, Miss Jamison is past eighteen, she didn't appear to be a day over sixteen.

She was small, too; counting what those slim heels added to her height, not more than an inch or so over five feet. Small and curveless and brown. From head to toe, brown. She wore brown. Her fluffy hair and her wide eyes were brown, and weeks of the city had not yet bleached out the sun-brown collected in a long summer at the shore.

Sweet child she was. Sweet—and also scared. She had been nerving herself for days to pay that visit, but for a moment after Miss Cassitt left us alone Marcy Ann's nerve was gone. I could read her panic. I thought she was going to turn and take wing without speaking. Then I saw her chin square.

"I must!" she said in a shaky little voice. *"Must!"*

SHE perched on the chair I had drawn up and for a space her brown gaze fixed on the benign face of the Founder, the Burr who served Abraham

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Lincoln so long and so well, looking down from the shadow box on the wall.

In life there had been something about the first Dan Burr that inspired the confidence of all and sundry met within the course of his busy professional career, and the gold of that straight-shooting character shines in the painting. I have never known anybody to look at the canvas and miss it, and Marcy Ann Jamison didn't miss it. The Founder reassured her. Her last hesitation yielded to the compulsion of those steady, wise, kind

eyes. Suddenly, unprompted, she was spilling.

What she told me was pretty much disconnected. As it added up at the end of our interview, her father was in a jam, and Marcy Ann herself didn't know what it was all about. She had no guess. But she had scented danger, and was out to fetch help.

Jamison *pere* was C. Gifford Jamison. He was a banker, first vice-president of the big Broadwall Trust Company, and in the Social Register as well as most substantially in the chips. Marcy Ann's mother had been dead some years and she and her father lived alone, except for servants, in a big old brownstone house in the east Eighties. And C. Gifford Jamison had always lived the quietest sort of life since Marcy Ann's earliest childhood, his interests centering in his office and his library at the town house and the gardens around his country place at Southampton.

But something was wrong now; had been wrong for some weeks past. Marcy Ann had first noticed a change in her father shortly after they came back from Long Island. He had been worried, moody, and a few nights before she had overheard words that had frightened her —caught them at the closed door of C. Gifford Jamison's library.

Her father's lawyer was in there, and it was his voice that had come to Marcy Ann.

"No, you *can't* go to the police, Jamison! You'll only be putting yourself on the spot if you do. This fellow means business and police would be no protection at all. You should see that clearly enough yourself."

That was all that Marcy Ann had caught; however, a night or two later she had seen a stranger seated with her father. She got just a glimpse of him before Jamison came swiftly across the library and shooed her and closed the door, but his face had haunted her from that instant on.

"A criminal face," she shuddered. "One ear was twisted like a cruller, and the jaw was undershot and the man's close-set eyes sent a chill through me.

"At breakfast I asked about him and father said, 'He's a friend of mine—an old friend I haven't seen for many years. We're in on a little business together now.'

"Of course, I didn't believe that. I couldn't believe it—couldn't hold back any longer. I told father I knew he was in trouble and begged him to tell me what the trouble was. At first he wouldn't admit that it was true. Then finally he said, 'There's nothing for *you* to worry about, my dear. There's been a little difficulty but it's very nearly at an end. I am proceeding now to handle it in my own way'."

Marcy Ann was looking down at her thin platinum vanity as she broke off, turning it over and over in nervous hands. Myself, I turned a few things

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over mentally—and please don't think I was short on sympathy for that poor kid when I say it.

TROUBLE for a citizen as solvent as C. Gifford Jamison—trouble curable by us—could very easily mean a windfall for the Burrs. That much was clear. And making no bones about it, there had been few times since the depression lopped off the last of our branches, leaving only the Chief and Junior and Miss Cassitt and myself to carry on in New York, when a windfall had been more sorely needed. Things in truth were so tough that the big summer place at Old Greenwich, built by the Founder just before his death and pride of the current Burrs, was in imminent danger of being snapped over by the mortgagee. Only a fat fee and a prompt one would save it, and Junior and the Chief had both been at their wits' ends when they decided to hop in the Mercedes and get what solace they could from the autumnal tints of New England.

Thus the financial drift taken by my thoughts as I listened to little Miss Jamison.

There were wealthier men in New York than C. Gifford Jamison, droves of them, but Jamison's name on a check large enough to solve all immediate fiscal problems of the Burr Agency and its principals would certainly be as good as J. P. Morgan's.

However—questions. Did C. Gifford really need our help and, if he did, could he be prevailed upon to accept it? I wished ardently that Dan Burr, Sr., had been at closer hand, he being a prevailer *par excellence,* and to Marcy Ann I gently suggested that perhaps it would be best to have a Burr representative get into direct touch with her father.

She paled at the thought.

"No, no! He mustn't know that I've been here. I just want him followed everywhere he goes—watched over—protected. I have money of my own. I'll pay for it all."

She had opened her small brown handbag and was fishing out yellow bills. I put my hand up, not out.

"I can't accept your money, Miss Jamison," I told her. "I have some advice to give you—only advice, for the present—and that will cost you nothing. Try to dismiss all this. Let things ride. If anything develops to give you further alarm, come back and let us know. We'll always be here at your call. For the time being, though——"

There's no need to go into the rest of it. Enough here that Marcy Ann was in a much relieved condition of mind when she left me. And as for myself, I kept on thinking about C. Gifford Jamison long after the door had closed behind her—about him and about the house in Old Greenwich, too.

That night I chanced to be up in the East Eighties and I made it a point to swing over by the Jamison home. Once I passed walking east from a Fifth Avenue bus to a Bavarian quenchery in deeper Yorkville where the beer and the pigs' knuckles are top cut and there's a peacherino of a fraulein who sings with a mob of hairy-legged aliens in short pants and dances now and then with the trade between songs.

It was toward ten o'clock then, and the shades of the brownstone front were down.

Westward bound about one, meaning to catch some air on an upper deck before the buses called it a night, I routed myself past Jamison's again, and as I approached someone was coming out. It was a well-dressed man with gray hair and a small gray mustache—at what proved to be an accurate guess, C. Gifford Jamison himself.

He was carrying a small oblong package about the size and shape of the padded brick customarily used for getting at jewelers' window displays after busi-

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ness hours, and I saw him look at his watch at the top of the brownstone stoop. Then he came down the steps, fast, and hurried over toward the park. All of a sudden, I changed my mind about catching the last bus downtown. Instead, very curious as to that midnight sally, I tailed Jamison, keeping on the opposite side of the cross street and then on the east side of Fifth Avenue while he sped north along the walk by the Central Park wall.

When he came to the first gate he headed into the park and very shortly thereafter Johnny Knowland of the Burr International Detective Agency — than whom, though I say it myself, the profession of the unsleeping eye knows no more expert shadow—flitted in at his heels.

The trail led to and around the hill from which the swank Casino snoots down on the peanut purchasing public. There, owing to the mist and the thickness of the planting, I lost sight of C. Gifford Jamison for perhaps a minute. That vital minute!

The click of his heels — not rubber heels, like mine—had abruptly stopped. But Jamison himself had not halted. He had left the walk and was cutting across the grass. Just enough light seeped from the Casino to show me his dim figure slipping into the bushes beyond a stretch of lawn.

I STAYED on the walk, hugging a tree, debating whether to follow or await developments where I was. Then —*pow!* Right in front of me, no further away than a Girl Scout javelin-throw, a pistol banged and my debate was over. I sprinted, grabbing for my own gun and my flashlight as I ran. Back of the bushes not ten seconds later my light played first on C. Gifford Jamison, erect and stiff as one of those statues along the Mall, and then swept a limp form sprawled on the ground.

The party who was down was nobody I had ever seen before, but one look was a tip-off. He had a cauliflower ear and a jutting blue chin and ugly little eyes that were staring hard, but seeing nothing by reason of a slug dead-centered between them. It was a crook's face if I ever saw one, and without knowing the ins or the outs of it, I was sure when I tried to zip Jamison out of the fire that the world had suffered no great loss.

And as I saw by the newspapers some hours later, it hadn't. A badge which had first led to the belief that the deceased was a Government agent had by then been discovered to be bogus. Furthermore, his prints had identified him as one Terence Moak, alias Terry the Shake, an ex-con recently emitted by Leavenworth after doing eight out of a maximum ten for impersonating a Federal officer.

The rest of the news, however, didn't read the way I had expected it would. C. Gifford Jamison, although played up prominently in the press, was not in the hoosegow charged with murder. He hadn't been pinched at all, or even incommoded by detention.

By some miracle he had got a grip on himself in that twinkle of time between my own fade-out and the arrival of the law, and shaken up a story that had gone over with sparrow cops and homicide cops both.

He himself, Jamison said, had come upon Moak only a moment before the police appeared. He had gone into the park to walk off a headache. He had heard a shot, summoned the nerve to investigate and found a body. There it was. That was all he knew.

And being who and what he was, C. Gifford Jamison had got away with it. Joey Molinelli had talked to him a while and let him go home.

On the surface it seemed that Jamison was in the clear. The papers were unanimously respectful in their handling of his name—but Joey Molinelli is an uncertain quantity all the time. I'd known

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him to let a lot of people go home who subsequently passed away in a sitting posture, chockful of volts, and so I wondered.

On a hunch, I raced through breakfast and taxied uptown, and at quarter after eight I had the cab parked a little way down the block from the Jamison domicile.

The meter clocked about ten minutes of waiting time and then C. Gifford Jamison, spatted and caned, was descending those brownstone steps once more.

He walked east toward the subway, and before he had reached the Madison Avenue corner a large man popped out of an area a few doors below me and went sauntering after him.

The large man was very large and his feet were very flat! I needed to see no more to know that Joey was playing cat again and Jamison was his mouse. Nothing else to it, I *had* to locate the Burrs.

IT TOOK me until after one o'clock to put the finger on the Mercedes and it cost exactly twenty-seven eighty-five in phone charges. Up to noon all my calls were hit-or-miss, but from then on it was a case of warm and warmer until at last good fortune put me in connection with an undoubtedly quaint little chow shoppe called the Lark and Spinet about sixty miles on the Labrador side of Boston.

Some dame with a Down East twang startlingly like our own Miss Cassitt's spoke up for the Lark and Spinet when the weary toll operator plugged me through. I asked her if by any chance she had served luncheon to two gentlemen traveling in a large open car with New York plates—one of the two small and trig and chipper, though no longer young; his companion about thirty and sleepy-eyed, adipose and rumpled—and the lady cautiously allowed:

"Might've." Then she asked, "Who are you?" and said, "Hold on there!" and the next voice I heard was Dan Burr, Sr's.

In less time than it took the phone company to clock another four bits on us I had exuded particulars leading to an instant decision by the Burrs to come home, and come flying. And fly they did. They shot back to Boston with the Mercedes wide open and came on from there by plane, leaving the car to follow on the night boat.

We had dinner that same evening, all three of us, at Billy the Oysterman's and while Junior was eye-brow deep in the second dessert the Chief closed himself in a phone booth and rang up Jamison. What style of approach he used I don't know. It was efficacious, however. When he came back to the table an appointment had been made, and at half past eight C. Gifford Jamison was bowing stiffly to a committee of three from Burr International.

He was in his library and already had company. There was a puffy-faced young man introduced as Waldo Thorpe, who was a nephew of Jamison's. Also a square-panned iron-gray individual who turned out to be C. Gifford's lawyer, one Sherwood Smythe. Thorpe was leaving as we arrived, but Smythe sat tight and was present through the entire proceedings.

THE legal light had just come in himself, and evidently was there as a result of an S.O.S. flashed to him by Jamison after his conversation with Dan Burr, Sr.

Mr. Smythe did the first talking. Distributing a three-way frown, he said, "Be good enough to explain, quickly and clearly, the purpose of this visit. No further ambiguities, if you please. On the telephone, as I understand, you were far from explicit."

The Chief nodded. "Quite so, Mr. Smythe. Intentionally so. A matter of precaution."

"Precaution, you say?"

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"Correct. We have excellent reason for believing that the police have tapped Mr. Jamison's wire."

Somebody gave a sharp little gasp, and that was C. Gifford Jamison.

"Absurd!"

"Not at all," Junior drawled. "The police are doing their duty as they see it. The painful fact is that they believe you know more, Mr. Jamison, than you've

told about that little fatality in Central Park early this morning. You're under surveillance, sir. If you doubt it, step to your front window. You'll see a watcher posted across the street. He's a Headquarters man. Wherever you may go he will not be far away."

I could see Jamison crumple under that jolt. He lost color. Smythe, differently affected, reddened and sat up straight.

"Outrageous!" he snapped. "But even if this is true, I fail to see where a private detective agency could be a party at interest."

Dan Burr, Sr., flashed him a brief but amiable smile.

"Naturally you wouldn't see. We're here to explain—*here,* not at Police Headquarters. Could you ask any better proof that the Burr Agency is in Mr. Jamison's corner?"

The Chief looked at me and fluttered an eye behind those wide-ribboned nose glasses, and I went to it.

"Mr. Jamison," I said, "I was in the park myself last night. Very near the Casino, too. I saw you there with the late Moak before the Audubon patrol did. And by the way, thanks a lot for leaving me out of your story." Jamison was halfway out of his chair as I added: "I was behind that flashlight." When I said that he dropped back.

"What?" he croaked.

"It's all right," I said. "I haven't as yet unburdened to the cops and it's unlikely that anyone but present company will ever know what I saw. Personally, I'm for you. I'd hate—I mean exactly that—to see you in a smear over the rubbing out of a mutt like Terry Moak."

I had meant to say more, but Smythe didn't let me go on.

"Stop!" he rasped. "What is this insinuation? What the devil are you people after?" He swung around to his staring client. "Damn it, Jamison. I believe it's blackmail!"

He fastened a glare on Burr Senior, but the Chief didn't turn a hair.

"Yes," he said, still affable. "The Burrs are of the same mind, Smythe. Blackmail, indeed. We have no doubt whatever that Mr. Jamison was being blackmailed and so was fully justified in eliminating Moak. Our hope is that we can be of material aid to him in avoiding unhappy consequences. That, in the briefest way of stating it, is why we solicited the present interview."

His voice was soft and after he had spoken his piece there was a space when a feather dropping on that deep-piled rug of Jamison's would have landed with a crash. Then, in the midst of thundering silence, the doorbell rang sharply and I saw young Dan bat an eye at the Chief and the Chief's brow cloud.

"Drat!" grumped Junior. "Why the devil would it have to be now?"

DIRECTLY, I was listening to voices in the front hall and to steps coming back toward the library. A servant tapped at the door and opened it to insert a neat set of sideburns.

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"Two—ah—gentlemen, Mr. Jamison. They say they are from Police Headquarters. Shall I——"

Along with the sideburns a thin black shoulder had showed through the discreetly opened door, but at that point a big hand dropped on the shoulder. Summarily the sideburns were withdrawn and the door swung wide.

Joey Molinelli and the oversize oaf who bodyguards him were revealed at the threshold, the servant thrust to their rear. Joey, who is personally not of heroic stature, threw a scowl at his convoy as he advanced.

"Now, that wasn't necessary, Sergeant," he admonished. "Can't you ever keep those mitts to yourself?" He took another step and stopped short, goggling at the Burrs. "Well, strike me pink!" he grunted. "Look who's here, Sarge! Was it a hunch I had this morning—or was it?"

Junior, accordioned over the biggest chair in the library, looked lacklustre at Molinelli and yawned, "Hullo, Lieutenant. Rather remarkable how we keep running across one another, not?"

"Yeah," Joey agreed, thin-lipped. "Interesting, ain't it?" He looked at C. Gifford Jamison. "Good evening," he said. "Hope we're not intruding, Mr. Jamison. I just thought of a couple of things I forgot to ask you about, and if I could see you privately for a minute—"

Smythe, up like a shot, cut him off. "Absolutely, you can't!" he blasted. "I speak as Mr. Jamison's counsel. Any further questions by the police will be asked in my presence."

"Not a bad idea," the Chief said. "Not half. Go ahead, Molinelli. We were just discussing the financial outlook with Mr. Jamison ourselves, and if you don't mind we'll stay where we are and resume when you finish."

Joey gave him a look that was part dirty and part smug.

"I don't mind at all, Dan. In fact, I might have a question or two for you and yours before I go. Then he barked, "Okay—*gimme!*" at his giant and an oblong package which I had seen before, but practically forgotten, came out of an overcoat pocket and passed from a large red hand to a small saffron one. At sight I identified it as the package that C. Gifford Jamison had carried into Central Park some twenty hours earlier, and I suddenly called to mind that Jamison no longer had it when I put the light on him.

Joey purred, "Ever see this before, Mr. Jamison?" And Jamison, white as his collar, shook his head.

"N-never! What is it?"

"Just a lot of blank paper—paper cut to the size of money. We found it in Central Park an hour or so after you and me had our chat. Found it in the bushes not so far from where Moak was dropped. I thought it might have some bearing. Straighten me out, huh?"

Smythe sliced in again. "Mr. Jamison has said he doesn't recognize your exhibit!" he snapped.

JOEY grinned. "I didn't hear him. Anyway, I'm not chalking it down against him. I'm giving him another chance to remember. I feel I ought to, because we took a lot of fingerprints off the wrapper and it would certainly look like hell if they turned out to be his."

Jamison's eyes wavered before Molinelli's. He was on the ropes and before Smythe could head him off he was desperately wheezing, "What of it? For God's sake, what of it? Suppose I did have a bundle of blank paper — why should it matter?"

Joey took time out to light a cigarette.

"I'll tell you," he said, letting go a long inhale. "It matters because of the way the paper is cut up. The size it's cut to, I mean. It would pass for a package of money. That's what we took it for when we found it—a dummy, made up

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to kid somebody who was looking for cash."

Joey threw a smirk toward the Burrs, but their eyes were locked at that moment and they didn't get it.

"And there was Terry Moak, shot dead," that velvet voice of Molinelli's went on. "A shake-down artist, a guy on the grab. I leave it to you, Mr. Jamison. I leave it to your own intelligence. What would anybody think? Why, hell, they'd think right away that somebody that Moak had something on had made a date to meet him in the park and pay him off. Yeah, and paid him off with a bullet after making it look as though he had everything his own way. I ask you, who would *that* be but the person whose prints were on the package?"

Smythe blared, "Enough!" But Jamison was overboard already. He fumbled in a humidor alongside him with a trembling hand and made a botch of tearing the band off a speckled perfecto.

"Very good, Lieutenant," he said, and though his voice was husky, it was suddenly steadier. "I did have that package and the fingerprints are mine. But as God is above me, I didn't kill Moak. I had no gun and I fired no shot. I have been a victim of blackmail — but the blackmailer was not Moak. The truth is that Moak was my ally. He was lying in wait for someone who had already been well paid for silence concerning a tragic episode in my past and who had expected another and far larger payment this morning."

For an instant a feeble smile twitched Jamison's lips as his eyes veered to counsel.

"Yes, Smythe, I finally came to the conclusion that your advice in the matter, good as it was, wasn't good enough. I decided to take things into my own hands and trap the blackmailer. Despairing of ever buying him off, I meant to scare him off and Moak was to do the scaring with that badge of his. He was to fake an arrest when the package I left in the bushes was picked up, and——"

JAMISON was open as wide then as Junior Burr ever opened the Mercedes. He had once been in prison. That was the chapter in his past that he had hoped was closed forever. He hadn't committed a crime—at any rate not one involving what the law calls "moral turpitude." As Jamison briefed it, it had been a case of his going out on a limb with a bank's money to save a friend from ruin; a vain effort ending in the friend's suicide and stir for Jamison.

That had happened in the West, long ago, and Jamison had thought when he came to the Broadwall Trust that he had lived it down. The prison stretch was years behind him. In New York only a few people knew that C. Gifford Jamison of Broadwall was the Charles G. Jamison who had lock-stepped away a three-year bit in Leavenworth, and those few were tight-lipped.

"On my own account, please understand," Jamison said, "I would never have paid one penny of blackmail. The president of the Broadwall Trust Company, the chairman of the board and the key directors were fully informed concerning me before I was invited to join Broadwall. Publicity might force my resignation, but I am not only approaching retirement age but can well afford to retire.

"My whole thought has been for my daughter. She has no suspicion that I have ever been a convict, nor of course have her friends in the Junior League; and for her sake I decided to meet the demands of an extortioner who some weeks since singled me out as a likely victim.

"Marcy Ann—my only child, all I have to live for—is about to make her debut and the blackmailer must have read some note of the fact. He will be found, I think—if he is ever found now—to be a

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prison contemporary of mine. Whoever he is, he knew that Charles Jamison and C. Gifford Jamison were the one person, and he recognized a golden opportunity for himself.

"In his first communication he bluntly pointed out that the daughter of an ex-convict would in all likelihood be socially unacceptable. He was in desperate need of money, he said, and he threatened exposure of my 'record' in the event of my failure to 'lay a grand on the line.'

"A thousand dollars was nothing. I left the money at the spot designated, and hoped he would be satisfied. He wasn't. He wrote to me again a few days later and said he had lost the thousand gambling and must have another. I was afraid then that I had taken on a pensioner who might in the end bleed me white, and I consulted my attorney. He —Mr. Smythe here—advised temporizing. I paid the second thousand. However, I was resolved to find some way of protecting Marcy Ann permanently and effectively.

"From time to time, I have befriended a man who was my cellmate for more than a year. You, Molinelli, would call that man an habitual criminal. He has been behind the bars several times since we were thrown together at Fort Leavenworth; but myself, I have always considered him as fundamentally decent. Also, I have never doubted the genuineness of his friendship for me, and when recently he dropped me a hail from the Middle West I answered his letter at length and laid my problem before him.

"I fancy, Lieutenant, that you know more than I of the swiftness of communication in the underworld. To me, the speed of my friend's response was unbelievable. My letter could not have been in Kansas City more than two or three hours when my phone rang here. It was Moak, introducing himself as a friend of a friend of mine and offering his services in silencing my blackmailer.

"That night—just night before last, it was—Moak and I sat in this room and laid our plans. There had been another and bolder demand—not for one thousand dollars, but for fifty thousand. The money was to be left in a certain spot near Central Park Casino. If I failed to leave it there at an appointed hour early this morning, I was informed, I would find myself cancelling all arrangements for Marcy Ann's coming-out before night.

"Now as you know, Terry Moak himself had made a business of extortion; but to him the blackmailer who threatened to blight an innocent child's life was a loathesome creature, outside even the criminal pale. When Moak had heard the story and read that last demand, a look came upon his face that sent a shiver down my spine. His eyes glittered murderously—and just then, as he growled out an oath, Marcy Ann herself came to the door.

"After I had sent her away, Moak's voice was deadly. 'And *that* was her!' he whispered. 'The poor little thing! Listen, Mr. Jamison, I don't want a nickel of yours. I'll croak that buzzard for you and call it a pleasure!'

"I wouldn't have it that way, though. I drew the line—sharp—at murder. I tell you again, Molinelli, that my scheme was simply to put the fear of God so deep into the blackmailer's heart that he would slink off and leave me at peace. Moak had at divers times represented himself as a Federal officer; on his person as we talked he even had what appeared to be a Government badge. I persuaded him that intimidation would suffice and eventually he agreed, not unreluctantly, that our trap should not be a death trap.

"MOAK, ambushed in the park shrubbery hours before I approached the Casino, had given his word to do his part with the least possible

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degree of violence; and when the pistol exploded behind me after I had deposited my dummy package and started away, my first thought was that he had been tempted, regardless, to take a pot shot at our man. I ran back to discover that it was Moak himself who had been hit.

"As I bent over him, saw that he was dead, I heard a crashing in the bushes—someone in flight.

"But no, Lieutenant, I *didn't* see the killer. To me he was just a vague blob of white darting off into the night.

"Then policemen were on the scene and I took a brace. What I told them, Lieutenant, was substantially what I later told you. I lied, yes. Can you blame me?

"Had there not been my daughter to think of, I ask you to believe that I'd never for one moment have held back the truth."

As Jamison broke off, Joey Molinelli was rubbing his chin. He had listened dead-pan, and whether he was sold any harder on that second version than he had been on the first one couldn't be told from looking at him.

The bad news re the fingerprints had cracked Jamison, but he hadn't broken and his own library was hardly the place

to break him. With the Burrs present and counsel sitting in, ready to bust up the session if questions got too hot, it wasn't even worth trying.

Joey knew it, and also he knew that to drag a Broadwall Trust vice-president down to Centre Street on his own responsibility meant a risk of getting his fingers dreadfully burnt. So he did what any cop with ordinary savvy would do. Bent on getting that new statement onto paper while the details were fresh, he promptly called it a night and bowed out.

The Chief gave me a high sign as the homicide squad exited, and I consulted the wrist-watch and remarked that I'd better be toddling myself. So I was out the front door before Joey was off the stoop; and seeing me coming, he nudged the sergeant and both of them waited at the curb.

Joey, outdoors, looked to be pretty well pleased with himself. He grinned, "Well, Johnny Knowland, how did you like it? Did it go over big, or did it?"

I said, "Did what go over?" and he crowed.

"The fingerprint stall. Get it, Johnny! There wasn't a single print on that package worth a hoot as evidence, nor on the murder gun either. I bluffed Jamison—knocked him off on a busted flush. What the hell! You might as well know it now."

That was in a way a surprise, though by no means a complete one.

"I knew it a long time ago, Joey," I said. "And don't think the Burrs didn't. You ran your bluff. So what? You made Jamison come through with the blackmail background, but where's the good? He never saw the blackmailer and he can't identify the killer."

Joey snorted. "No? Then I can identify him. That stuff about Terry the Shake laying for a blackmailer—boloney! Moak *was* the blackmailer. He put the tap on Jamison, and Jamison finally put the slug on him. But it's murder all the same, and as far as I'm concerned the investigation's about over. If Jamison had stood pat, he might've got away with it. But now all the drag in the world won't save him. Nor all the Burrs."

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Then right away Joey's pent-up curiosity exploded.

"And by the way, Knowland," he rapped out, "what the hell business has the Burr Agency got in this? Who invited you, and what for?"

"I really can't tell you," I said. "I'd love to, Joey, but after all I'm only an employee and I might just be guessing. The Burrs ought to be out soon. Wait around and ask them, why don't you?"

Joey slitted his eyes at me, and gave me a flash of the whitest and prettiest set of teeth at Headquarters.

"Not now, smart guy. But you might find me waiting some time soon with a handful of subpoenas—and how'd you shamuses like that, sweetheart?"

Then he grunted, "Nerts, Knowland; come on Sarge," and the two of them trekked for the subway with no response whatever to my cheery, "Good-night, all."

I DIDN'T go back in the house, but I stuck around outside. After a while a cab drove up and Sweet Child got out and jingled change and keys and vanished indoors. I didn't let her see me.

Half an hour passed without incident except for a brief exchange when Joey's peeper crossed over and tried not so successfully to discover what I was all about.

Then, with the flattie retired and again invisible, somebody came out on the Jamison stoop.

It was Junior Burr, sans hat and topcoat, looking for me and for information on the state of mind of Lieutenant Molinelli. He peeled the wrapper off one of those almond-salted chocolate bars he always has somewhere about his person and munched thoughtfully at it while I reported the ominous gist of my conversation with Joey.

"Unfortunate," Junior commented, "but by no means unexpected. Molinelli's the big menace—the only real one. Can we run down the murderer before the lieutenant goads Centre Street to impetuous and disastrous action? I'm apprehensive, Johnny."

I asked him what he meant, run down the murderer. Hadn't they been sitting with him?

"Tommyrot!" said Junior. "Jamison has showed us the blackmail notes. Adequate corroboration of his story, not?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. Did they come by mail?"

"No. By messenger."

"Then there you are. No postmarks. No sure check on dates. Jamison might have had Story No. 2 readied, just in case. Might've prepared documentary evidence in support. How about the guy in Kansas City? He'd be a help if Jamison's on the up and up now. Who is he anyway?"

"He's unavailable. I've talked with the Kansas City police by phone, and it seems they're looking for that friend of Jamison's themselves. They want to ask him about a few stick-ups; but he has, as they put it, lammed."

Junior finished his chocolate bar and rolled the tin-foil into a neat little ball.

"That's that, Johnny. The fellow wouldn't have been a strong witness anyhow. Who'd believe him if he did back up an old prison mate? Not Joey Molinelli, I guarantee. So father and I shed no tears over the news from Missouri. We're concentrating on those notes. First thing in the morning they'll be in the hands of Professor Gillen for microscopic examination and chemical tests—the latter particularly. The writing is manifestly disguised. But the ink, ah the ink! *That*, Johnny, interests us strangely."

"The ink?" I said, and Junior beamed.

"Wait, Johnny! Wait for Gillen's report. If it confirms what I now believe and hope, we may look for a very swift and happy denouement."

I asked him, "How?" but Junior didn't take time to go into details. Not then

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nor until more than forty-eight hours had passed.

"Father and I," he hastened on, "will be personally active. We have questioned Jamison further about the running figure he described and have an idea what that 'blob of white' might have been. Not a light suit—no. Nor a light topcoat."

"Then what?"

"Just as described—a *blob*. And about breast-high, Jamison says. Consider the terrain, Johnny. A breast-high blob of white! What would it be?"

"That dummy package?"

Junior wagged his head.

"Cold, Mr. Knowland. Icy. Let it pass. Father and I have a theory, and a blob of white jolly well fits. Also we have a program. We shan't be idle while Professor Gillen is at work. Our end, however, will be more or less routine; we may or may not get results. As our agreement with Jamison boils down, it will depend largely on you, Johnny, whether or not we spend another summer at Old Greenwich.

"Time is the essence of the contract, and time you must gain. You must maintain close contact with Molinelli, ingratiate yourself with him no matter how it goes against the grain, stave off action against Jamison to the last possible minute. Win us time, Johnny. *Time!*"

DON'T forget, Joey Molinelli is one hard little guy to shave. And besides, he and I had never been exactly bosom pals. I'd about as soon have taken on the chore of moving Madison Square Garden to the Bronx in a wheelbarrow as that one; and for a fact I still sometimes wonder how I ever kept Joey's hands off Jamison as long as I did. Of course, he knew it was a safe bet that a man of C. Gifford's standing wouldn't and couldn't run out on even a murder rap. Taken together with the feline element in Molinelli's nature, that helped. But also there were other homicide cops on the Moak croaking, and Joey isn't the man to let anybody beat him to a pinch.

Whatever he had reported at Headquarters regarding developments, there had been no leak to the newspapers. By Thursday afternoon they had practically forgotten Terry the Shake, being preoccupied with a later and juicier murder featuring a Seventy-second Street penthouse and a stock broker's blonde baby doll. But Joey was raring then. I met him and bought him breakfast—breakfast time for him being four p.m.—and I saw the end of the rope directly ahead.

I phoned the office right after Molinelli started downtown, and told Junior Burr it looked like a choice of delivering Jamison at Headquarters ourselves or having him called for.

"Well," Junior said, "you haven't done so badly, Johnny. At least Gillen has had time for his tests, and the result is highly promising. Don't worry further about Molinelli. I'll phone him myself. As for you, your time's your own until evening. Go to a movie, if you feel like it, and then get dinner. At eight o'clock make it a point to be at the Columbus Circle entrance to Central Park. We'll pick you up there."

I asked what was doing, but I didn't ask fast enough. Junior had slapped up the receiver, and I remained in the dark until I squeezed into the Mercedes nearly four hours later.

JUNIOR was at the wheel and he had plenty of company. The Chief was missing in the party, but Joey Molinelli was brooding alongside the wheel seat and C. Gifford Jamison and his lawyer and his dissipated-looking nephew Waldo Thorpe were in back. It was Hobson's choice for me and I pulled down one of the folding seats in the tonneau and parked on it.

"I make no rash promise, Johnny," Junior drawled over his shoulder as he

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slid into gear. "But it wouldn't be surprising if a murderer found himself caught up with before this night's over. Lieutenant Molinelli accompanies us to make the arrest."

I caught that knife-edge smile on Joey's face.

"Yeah," he said. "One way or another, I figure on a collar. Now where to?"

"Downtown, first," Junior told him. "But as I warned you all, we may have to do a great deal of running around before we're at the end of the trail."

And it surely was a run-around. Downtown, the Mercedes entered a dozen slum streets and halted while Junior explored smelly little groggeries. He spent all of two hours below Union Square, threading east and threading west, crawling along the Greenwich Village water front and through Ghetto neighborhoods between the Brooklyn Bridge and Williamsburg Bridge.

We went to Brooklyn; then, after Junior had made a phone call from a booth behind Borough Hall, we were shooting out a wide boulevard that landed us in Coney Island.

There Junior disappeared into a barroom on Surf Avenue and through the window I saw him telephoning again.

"What the hell!" Joey Molinelli growled when he came back. "How long does this go on?"

Junior said, "Patience, Lieutenant. Every stop means so much progress. Now we have another long jump—and I think it may be the last one."

Long was right. Coney Island to the Bronx. The outlying Bronx—City Line. And when the Mercedes came to rest again it was Friday morning, two o'clock and past.

There was a sort of plaza where we stopped. Anyhow, it was what was going to be a plaza some day when population spread thicker around it. There were half a dozen one-story shops, all dark, and the lights in a saloon were going out as we parked in front.

That left just a lunch-wagon for local night life, and Junior Burr turned his head to stare at the neon sign outside it.

"What does that read, Johnny?" he asked me. "Can you get it from your angle?"

"Just," I said. "That's the New Acropolis All Night Lunch, if it makes any difference."

"Ah!" exclaimed Junior. "The *New Acropolis!* Excellent! Wait just one more moment!"

A couple of huskies coming out of the gin-mill and Junior Burr slid in while the door was open.

"I just want to telephone," I heard him say.

"Him and his phoning!" snorted Joey Molinelli. "I don't know what the game is, but I'm fed up. I'm past my limit. When Burr comes out, it's a showdown."

But Junior came smiling, shining with a winner glow. He stared at the lunch wagon.

"That's the place, Lieutenant! The New Acropolis All Night Lunch. That's where we get our man. He's not there yet, but in a very few minutes he'll be at the counter being served with a hamburger sandwich and coffee. Shall we go over and get set? All right. Everybody!"

UNDER that well-fleshed exterior of Junior Burr's a really prodigious amount of energy is stored. He prefers to hoard it, makes it a practice not to lift a hand where a finger will serve his purpose, never in the ordinary course rises to perform a task that can just as well be disposed of by light pressure on a convenient button.

During ninety-nine days you may clock Junior in slow motion and see lethargy refined to an art. Then the hundredth day, a moment for action, and something happens inside him—something very like

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what science expects to happen when the atom is finally shattered.

The strength that stroked two great varsity crews onto the front pages bursts through those soft tissues that habits of ease and Junior's astounding heartiness at table have lain protectively about it. In a twinkling a tortoise turns into a hare. A round face is suddenly a square face, and you're swept off your feet by an entirely different Junior Barr — a lightning fast Junior, dynamic, irresistible.

I mean, he sweeps you. Jamison, Smythe, Thorpe, Molinelli—all of them thought that morning that Junior belonged in a strait-jacket. Their stares showed it. But while they were staring they were climbing out of the car and sixty seconds later a pleasantly surprised Greek was frying up six on his hamburger hot plate for an unexpected rush of carriage trade.

Crossing from the Mercedes, Junior's nose had been quivering like a pointer's. It still twitched spasmodically, holding Joey Molinelli fascinated, as those piping slabs of chopped beef were deftly slapped onto the lower halves of toasted rolls and sprinkled with crisp and aromatic onion.

"Lunch-wagon hamburger!" murmured Junior. "Ambrosia!" His stool squeaked sharply under his weight as he made a half turn toward Joey. "Eat, Lieutenant! Stay yourself. It may be hours before there's a chance for another bite."

But Joey was short on appetite. So were the others. Four sandwiches and three Javas stood untouched as Junior wolfed his hamburger and washed it down. I ate mine in a kind of coma, hardly tasting it, and Jamison lifted his crock a couple of times in a shaky hand and sipped from it.

We were the only customers in the wagon, but just as Junior Burr took his last swallow of coffee and reached for a paper napkin a taxicab pulled up at the curb. The hackie poked his face in the door—a hard face.

"Yeller been around?" he wanted to know.

"Not yet," the Athenian said. "Pretty soon now he come. You hit lucky number, huh?"

"Yeah. About time, too. Two solid years I been playin'. I'll wait in the cab."

JOEY MOLINELLI was squinting at Junior as the taxi's radio, tuned on some tin-panny little night-owl station, began squawking outside. Holding his voice down, he demanded:

"And *we're* waiting for Yeller too, are we? He's your guy—yeah? What you think you've got on him? Shoot it!"

Junior Burr crumpled up his napkin and sighed.

"Frankly," he said, "I'd feel better outside another hamburger or two. But I appreciate your impatience, Molinelli, and I'll deny myself. I promised you a murderer tonight. Well, you'll have him shortly. For the present moment—you'd like a bit of light on the case against him, I dare say?"

Joey shifted his eyes from the sliding door. They flickered on Jamison, then on Junior.

"I asked for it, didn't I? What about this Yeller? I've got to have facts—plenty facts, strong facts—before I move a muscle!"

Junior nodded. "Don't worry about the facts, Lieutenant. They're not only conclusive, but guaranteed by the Burrs. Some will not be new to you, for you've already had them from Mr. Jamison. You were in a hurry that evening, though. You heard about the blackmail notes, but you left before Mr. Jamison produced them.

"That is to be regretted. Had you lingered, I have no doubt you would have observed what father and I observed when we examined those notes. The

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paper was cheap, torn from such a pad as can be bought in any one of ten thousand stationery shops in New York; with our limited organization we couldn't dream of tracing it to the purchaser. Also, the extortioner had been careful not to leave a clue to his identity in his handwriting. But nevertheless, he had made a fatal slip."

Joey was listening, but not swallowing.

"A slip, eh?"

"A slip of the pen, figuratively speaking."

"Can the figurative stuff. Speak plain. *What* was fatal?"

"What the pen held, Molinelli. It was loaded with poison, as the owner will soon discover."

Somebody was cutting across the plaza toward the lunch-wagon, and at the sound of the heel taps Joey's shoulders jerked up.

"Yeller!" he whispered. "Snap it, Burr! Poison? How?"

"Well, there was something curious about the original blackmail demand. Challenging. A variance in the color of the writing fluid. It was blue through the first word or two. Then blue-black."

Joey was staring out at a swarthy little man in a belted coat who had come to the musical cab and was talking to the hackie.

"Yes, that's him! Cripes sake, hurry! Get to your point."

"It's made," said Junior. "One continuous piece of writing and two different inks—what would it mean, Molinelli? The writer had used a fountain pen, of course. There'd been some ink in it—black ink. And the blackmailer, just before putting his initial demand on paper, had filled his pen from a well holding blue ink. So blue came first.

"You see it now, Lieutenant? You're familiar enough with the achievements of the police laboratory, I'm sure, to know that the ink left by even a single short pen stroke can be analyzed chemically by a skilled technician.

"You must know, too that there's no greater analytical chemist in America than Professor Gillen of Columbia—and when you make your arrest you'll have Gillen to thank. Not the Burrs, but Gillen. We simply turned the notes over to the Professor and then made it our business to find the blackmail pen. Father dug it up tonight while we were driving hither and yon. He took it to Gillen, who swiftly checked on a sample of the mixture of inks it holds and declared it the identical blend with which the demands on Mr. Jamison were written.

"And Gillen is ready to prove that by no accident of chance could two pens hold the different chemical ingredients of the blue ink and the black ink in those same proportions. It's as impossible, he says, as that two different men could leave identical fingerprints."

I COULD see it, and Joey Molinelli could too. Half the time when he's off duty he's hanging around the police lab, and if any cop at Headquarters is up on science it's Joey. His skepticism was all gone.

"Yes, yes!" he snapped. "I give it to you, Burr. If Gillen says so, it's so. But how do you pin the pen on Mr. Yeller?"

Junior blinked at him.

"Tut, Molinelli! The man's just a numbers-game runner. He has no connection. None at all. Fact is, the owner of that doomful pen is a person well known to Mr. Jamison. All through the night he's been at your elbow and he's sitting at this counter now. Outside extortion, his profession is the law—his name, Sherwood Smythe!"

But Sherwood Smythe had been an attentive listener, and was no longer sitting. He was off his stool, purple-faced, and a hand that had lunged under his coat whipped out a pistol.

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The gun banged twice, its first bullet just missing Junior Burr and crashing through empty air where the Greek's head had been a split-second earlier. The second bullet didn't miss. It couldn't. Smythe had the muzzle pressed to his own head as his finger squeezed the trigger, and he was just as dead as Terry Moak when he sagged down on the floor.

MYSELF, I didn't wait for the ambulance. Junior Burr wanted Jamison out of there fast and I took him in the Mercedes—Jamison and his nephew both. As we whisked for the car Junior called after us, "A thousand apologies, Mr. Thorpe!" But Thorpe apparently didn't know what the apologies were for, and personally I couldn't guess.

A couple of hours later, however, I found out. Junior was at police headquarters then, and the Chief had joined up with him. They were talking and Lieutenant Molinelli was taking notes, and as I arrived Junior was saying:

"It was father, Lieutenant, who first got the notion that what Jamison called a 'blob of white' might have been an expanse of white shirt-front. Considering that Central Park Casino was so near by and that evening dress is the rule there, he hazarded that the person seen by Jamison had come from the Casino and fled back to it after the shooting.

"We were not, of course, overlooking the possibility that the blackmailer was some one in Jamison's own circle, and the shirt-front theory tender to strengthen that possibility. We listed the names of nearly a dozen of our client's intimates—all who knew he had been in prison—and checked on them.

"Mostly they were occasional patrons of the Casino, but Smythe and Thorpe had been there much more frequently than the others. And those two, also, would more likely have been in pressing need of money than any of the rest. Smythe, we found, was head over heels in the stock market; and Thorpe, an idler, was chronically hard up.

"When we started our tour in the Mercedes last night, I confess, I had no more reason to suspect Smythe than to suspect Thorpe. I believed that one of them had blackmailed Jamison and killed Moak—but which one?

"I had borrowed Thorpe's fountain pen at one time and Smythe's at another, on the pretext that I had neglected to fill my own. But neither pen held ink corresponding with that analyzed by Professor Gillen. Our best hope, our one hope, was that one of the two might have a second pen.

"While we ran about last night, father looked for it. He got into Thorpe's apartment, then into Smythe's. It was burglary—but burglary to solve a murder. Excused? You understand now, I think, that in all my wanderings in the Mercedes I was merely killing time, keeping Smythe and Thorpe safe, giving father a chance to hunt that second pen. We had our Jap posted at the phone in our own apartment and through him we maintained contact. When I called from Coney Island there was good news, a message from father. He had discovered a pen in Smythe's rooms that wrote blue-black and was rushing it to Gillen.

"I made the long jump from Coney to give the Professor as much time as I could, and when I phoned from the Bronx his test was completed and guilt established."

As Junior paused Joe Molinelli looked at him hard.

"Yeah?" he said. "And why the hell didn't you tell me right away? What was the sense of that crackpot shift to the lunch-wagon? Answer me that, Mr. Daniel Burr, Junior!"

Junior yawned widely.

"Crackpot, Joey?" he murmured. "Why wasn't it perfectly reasonable—why indeed? I hadn't had a bite since half past six, and I was famished!"

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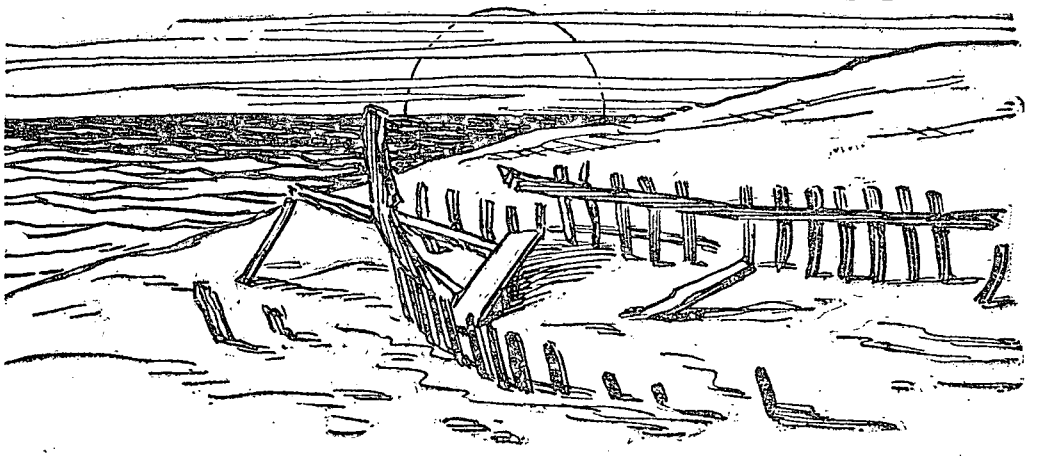
The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE



The Danites

STORIES of the fighting Danites—the Mormons—are more often linked up with the activities of the sect in and about Salt Lake City than with the stormy coast of Lake Michigan—where Frank Mason has laid the scene of his enthralling yarn, the first part of which is in this SHORT STORIES. But it is a fact that there was a colony of Mormons (Danites, they were called as "Sons of Dan") on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan. It was founded in 1847 by James W. Strang—who appears in the Mason story—who for a time was supported in his claim for Presidency of the Latter Day Saints by the Smith family after the death of Joseph Smith, founder of the sect. Strang, a native of Wisconsin, was baptized into the church in 1844, and after he and his band of followers had settled on Beaver, was crowned "King of Zion" there in 1850. He was later killed by some of his followers, according to historical fact, in 1856 when his kingdom broke up.

Two Captains Who Disappeared

FOR many years, the mystery of Franklin's fate was one of the greatest enigmas in the world. After many years, it was fully solved when the scribbled note signed by the two captains was recovered with the chart on which it was written; it may be seen today in London.

"The fate of Franklin was no longer a mystery," writes H. Bedford-Jones about his mysterious disappearance story in this issue, "but that of Crozier and Fitzjames has never been solved. I hope this solution of it will honor, as it should, the memory of these gallant gentlemen. But here I think it should be emphasized that this is a series of fiction, not of historic fact; in connection with this story particularly, lest anyone take for granted that the story is a true one."

The Fur Trappers

A LETTER from Harry Sinclair Drago about his story in this issue says:

"This is not an alibi; all I want to do is to put in a word before the jury gets the case. I suspect that some of my trapper friends are going to say when they read about a winter rendezvous: 'Furs are prime in cold weather. If a trapper isn't out running a trap-line in the winter, when is he going to do it?'

"That's all true enough, but on such a good authority as Ruxton, in his *The Old West!* the winter rendezvous was a regular institution. In those old days a trapper could be reasonably sure that by early January he would have peltries enough to load down his mule. It was just common

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In the Next Issue **Short Stories** For October 25th

A slick guy thought he'd try a snatch in Eastern waters, in the territory of Kappie De Vries, of all people. But he found out what it takes——

TO BEAT THE DUTCH

A long novelette by

R. V. Gery

A Young American Meets up with a Chinese War Lord—

TIGER OF THE YANGTZE

by Alfred Batson

All in the Next Issue

CHARLES W. TYLER

F. V. W. MASON

ROBERT H. ROHDE

H. BEDFORD-JONES

JIM HENDRYX

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sense to get them to his trading-post while the Indians were not on the move, which was usually the case in mid-winter. To cache them, go into the post and then return for balance of the season was done often enough when travel could be made by canoe. On the other hand, more than one trapper who cached his furs and then started back with his mules laden down with a whole winter's bounty in the early spring came to disaster and lost his whole take. Between saving your peltries and your hair there was no choice.

"Martin Hunter, who as clerk and factor spent forty years in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, says that in the interior posts the company appointed the 25th of October to begin hunting and the 25th of May to finish; except on bear, which the H. B. C. would buy as late as June 10th. Free traders—those outfitted by the Great Company—left the different posts before the freeze-up and did not return until the following June. Time, distance, meant nothing to them. Their trading was with Indians and half-breeds who might not get into a post oftener than once in several years. But the white hunter, or trapper, trading with an established post, seldom had more than a week's journey between himself and civilization, and he made a point of not missing the winter rendezvous.

"Especially was this true at the prairie posts, where the H. B. C. was engaged in its epic struggle with the Northwest Company. Posts were changing hands so unexpectedly that a man was often hard put to know under which flag he was working. 'Might was right and wherever furs were found the strongest party, for the time being, took them,' says Hunter. 'The H. B. C. after having inhabited all the territory that they could rightfully claim under their charter, began to oppose the Northwest Company's people trading on the Red, the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan, all rivers that they (the H. B.C.) could claim, seeing that they drained into Hudson's Bay, and then began one of the keenest and most bloody commercial warfares in history.

" 'In old Canada the fur trade had always been the principal commerce of the country and after the French regime several Scotch merchants of Montreal prosecuted it with more vigor than heretofore. This they did under the name of the Northwest Company. Their agents and *courier des bois* were ever pushing westward and had posts strung from Ottawa to the Rocky Mountains.

" 'Now retaliation became the unwritten law of the country and what was this week a Hudson's Bay Post was next week occupied by a party of Northwesters, or vice versa. There is hardly a place in what is now the peaceful and law abiding Province of Manitoba but what, if it could tell the tale, had witnessed at some time in its early history sanguinary conflicts between the two powerful and rival companies.' "

African Natives Who Hunt with Lions

THE Major and Jim of L. Patrick Greene's stories frequently met up with lions on their journeys and they doubtless knew that among the strange things encountered in Africa are natives who are capable of exercising an uncanny power over lions. At night, whenever the most daring and well-armed white man would not venture outside, these natives go unarmed into the bush and hunt with lions, sharing their kills, the natives being completely immune from attack. In regions where game animals are protected by law, lion-natives are the bane of game wardens. Roaming with lions that kill the game, the natives are able to procure the protected animals without fear of legal penalty, the lions being the killers and not the natives.

Following is a case of a lion-native cited by Captain Wm. Hichens of the

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political service in British East Africa. Named Gunda she Maguila this native was fined 50 shillings in January, 1932, by the council court of his tribe for helping a lion out of a game-pit. The game-pit is the method used by natives to trap lions that raid their cattle-pens, the tawny raider falling into a cleverly concealed pit dug for him in the earth. At the mere sound or scent of a man's approach to the pit a lion trapped therein becomes a demon of fury. But in this case the native had calmly descended into the pit and helped the lion out! Had anyone else undertaken this he would certainly have been torn to pieces by the infuriated beast. At his court trial the native claimed that the lion had been *his* lion, one with whom he had hunted for years and shared its "kills."

Some light might be shed on the lion-native mystery by telling how a young native in northern Transvaal came to make friends with a family of lions, it appearing probable that some lions are naturally friendly in their wild habitat to humans. Named Maramidsha Mushbidi, this native found it necessary to flee from his tribe to escape trial for a misdeed. Fleeing into the jungle the fugitive sought refuge in a cave, which turned out to be the lair of a lion family. Presently a huge male, his mate and three cubs came to the cave. Hastily the native built a fire and kept the beasts from entering.

The next day the lions slew a zebra. Being famished the native made a fire-brand and with this he drove the lions from their "kill." Then he ate his fill of the meat and went back into the cave. Having slept but little and the heavy meal of meat increasing his drowsiness, he fell asleep. Upon awaking hours later the fugitive discovered that the lions had entered the cave and lain down near him like big house cats. They did not appear to mind his presence.

A few days later the native came upon a wounded antelope, which he dragged into the cave. This he and the lions shared, and this made their strange friendship complete, for after that the native and the lions roamed the forest together, the man sharing the "kill" made by the beasts.

On India's Northwest Frontier

THAT the Mad Mullah of Ipi would jeopardize his chance of a lifetime to blow up Fort Maude in order to work out a new kind of torture on his prisoners —mental rather than physical—is not overdrawn," writes Perry Adams in connection with "Pappy Dunphy's Soup," his story in this issue. "Quixotic isn't quite the word I want, but it's near enough, perhaps, to describe the queer streak in many Pathans—almost a national characteristic, in fact—which so often impels them to ignore the impersonal mountain for the more personal molehill."

Bobcat

THERE is a story of Omar Barker's hunch-conscious little sheriff coming in the next issue, but meanwhile here's a letter he wrote us about another matter:

"While hunting on the Vermejo a few years ago, Elliott Barker, present New Mexico State Game Warden, shot with his .45 a big bobcat that his dogs had treed, tied it across the back of his saddle with the saddle strings and continued his hunt. Following his hunting pack on a lion's trail about half an hour later he felt something nip his horse on the leg and his horse came suddenly undone and began to buck. The bobcat, only stunned by a glancing bullet on the head, had come very much alive. His claws raked the horse's flanks, with now and then a successful reach at the hunter's leg. And at every touch of the cat's claws the horse bucked harder and harder. Fifteen miles from the nearest camp in over two feet of snow, Barker did not dare let himself be thrown and left afoot, though he could easily have gone off in the deep snow without getting

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hurt. Besides, to let his frightened horse get away from him with a live cat on the saddle would mean a lost or ruined pony. The bucking animal was giving him all he could do to stay on, but finally he managed somehow to slip one hand back and grasp the bobcat's neck—and for what seemed an hour he rode a bucking horse with one hand and choked a fighting bobcat with the other—until finally the cat was dead."

"Hereafter, Barker says, they'll be dead before he ties 'em on the saddle.

"S. Omar Barker."

Murdered With Germs

MURDER mysteries abound, but one of the strangest crimes to come to light in many years was the recent murder of a wealthy Hindu in Bombay, by an injection of plague bacilli. The victim was a rich land owner, who, while strolling along the street on his way home, suddenly felt a sharp stab in his left arm. Wheeling around he caught a glimpse of his stepbrother as he disappeared in the crowd.

Upon examination of the wound which was only a tiny puncture, but very deep, proved it had been made with a hypodermic needle. The man died a week later with all the symptoms of plague, which diagnosis was subsequently confirmed by the authorities.

The dead man's stepbrother, convicted of committing the murder, implicated a certain doctor, who, he claimed, secured the plague bacilli for him from a local hospital laboratory. After the trial both men were executed for the crime.

The stepbrother, it seems, was administrator for an estate, and had been robbing the slain man for some time. When the latter became suspicious he appointed a babu lawyer to look after his interests. The stepbrother fearing that his shortages would be discovered planned the murder with his friend the doctor.

Queer Foods

EVERY now and then in the stories in our pages we find the characters partaking of foods of the country they are adventuring in, and we are forcibly reminded that "one man's meat is another man's poison." The intercourse between nations, however, very often leads to the adoption of one of another's favorite dish. Snails, always popular in France, no longer offend the American palate; indeed are relished by persons in this country. Why they should be rejected by the man who likes oysters is a mystery.

In Canton, rats sell for fifty cents a dozen, and dogs' hind quarters command a higher price than lamb or mutton. The Chinese epicure revels in ancient pigeon eggs, putrifying fish, and a soup made of birds' nest, the latter a gelatinous regurgation which certain sea birds apply to the lining of their nests costing thirty dollars a pound.

In the West Indies baked snakes is a common dish, where reptiles abound, and it is a good way of getting rid of them. But when it comes to frying palm worms in fat, one would think the stomach would rebel. It is not, however, though, by a strange consistency, stewed rabbit is looked upon with aversion.

On our Pacific Coast the Digger Indians eat dried locusts, and in the Argentine Republic skunk flesh is a dainty. Our own favorite bivalve, the oyster, is very disgusting to a Turk, while devil fish, eaten in Corsica, is equally so to us.

The Indians of the Upper Amazon excel in gastronomic feats and strange dishes; banana stew is a staple dish, monkeys are eaten, and parrots common game birds.

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The Brazilians eat ants, probably to get rid of them, for they literally infest the country, and are numerous in size. Parrots are also eaten in Mexico, while roasted spiders are considered a choice dish in the new Caledonias. Silk worms are found delicious by the Chinese; caterpillars are to the African like reed birds on toast, and bees are included regularly in the diet of the Singhalese.

Geophagy, or the habit of earth-eating is rather widespread. Amazonian "dirt eaters" gorge themselves with a certain kind of earth mixed with fish and fried in alligator fat. This concoction is made into a Johnny-cake which at best, must be as unpalatable as a dog biscuit.

"Stone butter," is a fine clay spread upon bread in place of butter in many parts of Germany. Earth is baked in bread in the northern part of Sweden, and on the peninsula of Kola. It is also sold in the open market in Sardia and in parts of Italy, while Persians use it in the manufacture of sweetmeats.

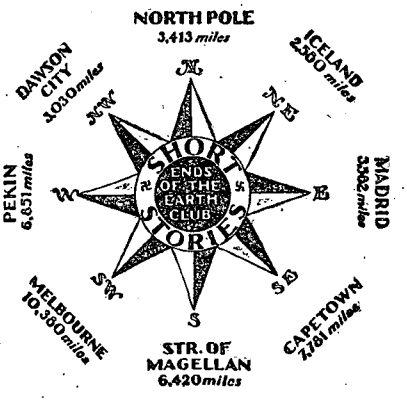
In Nubia, earth is used as a medicine and to many primitive tribes its use has also a religious significance. The habit is general over almost all of India, and the gray or drab-colored shale, which is the favorite in northern India, and which is excavated at Meth in Bikanir, is exported to the Punjab at the rate of two thousand camel loads a year.

In other countries throughout Asia assorted varieties of clay are eaten, but if the natives have at one time a taste for a special kind of mud, as the habit increases the depraved appetite soon becomes satisfied with bricks and broken earthen pots. Although white ant-soil, including nest ants, is a great delicacy.

Probably the most remarkable of all appetites is the Mexican taste for dynamite. This singular craving is confined to a certain locality where the people break off the explosive, roll it into a pill and dissolve it in a glass of mescal. After drinking the liquor the result is a delightful vision-engendering intoxication.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.



Four years a sailor, now a soldier in Hawaii, and the next hop is to China. There should be some interesting stories there.

Dear Secretary:

For the past two years I have been a constant reader of SHORT STORIES. The first thing I look for is the Ends of the Earth Club. I enjoy the letters very much. I have often wanted to write myself and see if I could get some pen pals, but I figured that I did not have very much of a chance on my first try.

However, I am sending this S.O.S. for some pen pals all over the world. I am sure that anyone who will write to me will

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find that I am able to write some interesting things, as for about four years I have been a sailor and have hit a good many ports in this good old world. At present I am in the Army stationed in Hawaii. I expect to go to China next.

To the first dozen that answer this plea, I shall send a very interesting souvenir of the islands.

Very truly yours,
George L. Copeland

Headquarters Special Troops,
Hawaiian Division,
Schofield Barracks,
Territory of Hawaii

Forty thousand stamps and still looking for more.

Dear Secretary:

I am an Argentine and I wish to become a member of your good and useful club.

I have been a reader of SHORT STORIES for years. I would like to receive letters from every country. I have a collection of more than forty thousand stamps and I promise everyone that writes to me on this subject and wishes to exchange stamps, that I shall send them some stamps of this country.

Hoping to hear from someone soon, I remain

Yours respectfully,
Jorge Viglione

Austria, 1998,
Buenos Aires,
Argentina,
South America

Who'd like to brush up on his German. Here's an excellent opportunity to correspond with someone who lived there for fourteen years.

Dear Secretary:

I wish very much to join the Ends of the Earth Club sponsored by SHORT STORIES.

I am not a fellow from "the ends of the earth," but I have lived in Germany for almost fourteen years. I have been in Poland and Lithuania, touched France and England, and since 1934 I have lived in the United States. I naturally speak perfect German and would like to correspond with anyone who writes German or who would care to try his German. By now I believe I have mastered the English language quite well, learned a little French, and trying hard to study Spanish. I have been collecting stamps for a number of years and would like to trade, especially South American ones. I can give quite a few Lithuanian and German stamps.

Very cordially yours,
Gustav Berlowitz

Port Allegany,
Pennsylvania

Mining, fur trading, Indians—but no Eskimos!

Dear Secretary:

This is the first time that I've seen SHORT STORIES and, though I haven't yet read my copy, it promises to be full of interest.

I was so intrigued by the Ends of the Earth Club that I sat down to write this letter before reading any stories. It's just what I have always looked for. I want correspondents in Hawaii, South America, France, Germany, and anywhere in the world.

The Pas is in the northern part of Manitoba in the heart of a mining district and close to the fur trading ones. There are Indians here but no Eskimos.

Yours sincerely,
H. Yorke

Box 34,
The Pas,
Manitoba,
Canada

Cryptography, codes or ciphers—any takers?

Dear Secretary:

Somehow I feel like a chicken coming

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home to roost. It's hard to explain for a brief flash in the mirror assures me that I don't look like one. Maybe it's because I am returning once more to the fold. You see it's almost six years since I last wrote you and, though I'm sure you bore the burden in fine style, it is that which makes me feel like a chicken coming home to roost.

I should like to hear from club members who are interested in cryptography, codes or ciphers. I should be glad to answer any letters and perhaps swap a little information on the subject. Any takers?

Best of luck to SHORT STORIES which has stood by me like an old friend for the past six years.

Most sincerely,
Robert N. Pancoast

1320 Laurel Avenue,
Wanamassa,
Asbury Park,
New Jersey

Unfortunately we have no membership lists other than those published in the magazine, so I'm counting on all of you to keep Comrade Estling busy.

Dear Secretary:

Quite some time ago I became a member of the Ends of the Earth Club. Since that time I have been working out of town and have had little time to take an active part in the affairs of the club.

I am now living in New York again and am interested in corresponding with members in some of the remote corners of the globe. I am particularly interested in corresponding with young men in Germany around my own age which is twenty-six.

Could you supply me with a list of names and addresses. Your early reply would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,
Charles B. Estling

2251 Gleason Avenue,
New York City,

How about some mail in every port for this lonesome sailor?

Dear Secretary:

May I be admitted to the ranks of the Ends of the Earth Club and have my name inserted in the list for prospective correspondents?

I am a radio operator on British merchant ships and there is nothing more welcome to a sailor than a bunch of letters on entering a foreign port—and nothing more disheartening than to receive none.

I would be pleased to hear from members between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-eight, especially from those in seaports which I might call and perhaps see at a later date.

Every good wish to SHORT STORIES which I have read for many years in all parts of the globe.

Sincerely,
C. D. Grimster

265 Crosby Road,
Seaforth,
Liverpool,
England

A hiker and a scoutmaster in Canada.

Dear Secretary:

I am a regular reader of SHORT STORIES and I must say that it is the only magazine that a fellow can pick off the rack that will give him a variety of good stories, and I mean good stories.

I am thirty-one years old. I take in a lot of outdoor exercise, such as hiking up into the high hills and timberland. Anyone who wishes to know anything about the timber ways of British Columbia, I would be only too glad to try and furnish the answers as well as photos.

Yours very truly,
F. Foster

Haney,
British Columbia,
Canada

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SAVE THESE LISTS!

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

Colon L. Baubeson, Box 222, Hopkinton, Massachusetts
Val Rilling, 107 Edger Street, Seattle, Washington
Rubin Rosenfeld, 1201 Elder Avenue, Bronx, New York City, New York
Roland W. Ruff, Room 32, Y.M.C.A., Charleston, West Virginia
Louis E. Salazar, Jinotepe, Carazo, Nicaragua, Central America
George Sale, 813 Fifth Street East, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Clinton H. Shaffer, 4416 Sixth Avenue, Northwest, Seattle, Washington
H. Sivia, 513 Tennessee Avenue, Palestine, Texas
R. A. Squires, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale, California
William Stelter, 544½ Balcom Street, Eau Claire, Wisconsin
Edwin A. Taylor, 158 Linden Boulevard, Brooklyn, New York
E. Taylor, Box 39, Black Creek, New York
Otis S. Thieler, Hdq. Ser. Company, 5th Engineers, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia
Walter Thomson, 1803 Mahn Avenue, New York City, New York
Thomas Toner, 29 Wesley Street, Stanhope Street, Liverpool 8, England
Alvin Ray Vincent, 859 Wrightwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
Anthony Von Dohlen, 3817 Broadway, Galveston, Texas
W. E. Weedy, 308 South Sioux Street, Cherokee, Iowa
Rex A. Wertz, c/o Sierra Vista Ranch, Delano, California
Berton A. Worden, 144 Carmarthen Street, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada
James H. Zimmer, Company 818, C.C.C. Camp SP3A, Phoenix, Arizona
Fusilier C. Waldron (5979), British Embassy Guard, c/o Army Post Office No. 1, Tientsin Area, China Command
George K. W. Wallace, 446 Benson Street, Crown Hill, Monrovia, Nigeria, West Africa
Louis Walmer, 4436 Colonial Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Garth Walther, Yahk, British Columbia, Canada
Robert Wilson, 646 Monmouth Street, Newport, Kentucky
Samuel L. Woessner, P. O. Box 63, Main Office, Union City, New Jersey
H. Yorke, Box 34, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada
Irving I. Woodard, 834 New Richmond Hotel, Seattle, Washington
Sunday N. Apkan, Nyemoni School, Abonnema, via Degena, Nigeria, West Africa
John M. Arney, 3543 North Hoyne Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
E. L. Atwell, U. S. Marine Hospital, Key West, Florida
Ray Barrett, Box 555, Mobridge, South Dakota
C. Beard, 41 Morningside View, West Derby, Liverpool, 11, England
Francis Bedard, 129 Moreland Street, Springfield, Massachusetts
Gustav Berlowitz, Port Alleghany, Pennsylvania
Rogers Billings, Fredericksburg, Texas
Alberto Birmingham, Av. Roque Saenz Pena 636, Buenos Aires, Argentina, South America
Hyman Blum, 1880 East 14th Street, Brooklyn, New York
Private D. R. Brandon, 88th Reconnaissance Squadron, Hamilton Field, San Rafael, California
Michael C. Briggs, B.C.M. School, Abonneme, via Degema, Nigeria, West Africa
William T. Cleary, 2725 Webb Avenue, Bronx, New York
John Colbert, 24 Marlborough Avenue, Kilkenny, South Australia
Robert Cronin, 722 Second Avenue, South, Jamestown, North Dakota
James E. Crouch, P. O. Box 1283, San Francisco, California
Sergeant H. W. G. Curry, Cantonment Police Station, Clerk Street Camp, Karachi, India
George T. Dappa, c/o St. Thomas School, Azumini, via Aba and Port Harcourt, South Nigeria, West Africa
Leo De Kay, 127 South Whipple Street, Chicago, Illinois
Alton Davis, 2 Van Dusean Court, Westfield, Massachusetts
David D. Dennar, St. Peters School, Nsokpo, via Port Harcourt, West Africa
Vernon N. Drew, 31 Wilder Street, Montello, Massachusetts
Nathan Engle, Carrier No. 427, G.C. P. O. North, New York City, New York
Augusto Eustaquio, 403 Togae Street, Agana, Guam
Arno Feltner, Camp Prescott SP-13, Medford, Oregon
Francisco Franquez, San Ramon Street, Agana, Guam
Jesus Franquez, San Ramon, Agana, Guam
Jesus Garrido, 10 Tutujan Street, Agana, Guam
Andrew Gill, 902 North 36th Street, Richmond, Virginia
Walter L. Glidden, Rua da Mooca 515, Sao Paulo, Brazil South America
Harold Goldstein, 1258 South Kailor Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
C. D. Grimster, 265 Crosby Road, Seaforth, Liverpool, England
Franklin H. Hallgrimson, Cypress River, R. R. 1, Manitoba, Canada
Lindal J. Hallgrimson, R.R. 1, Cypress River, Manitoba, Canada
I. M. Harvey, 210 South Main Street, St. Albans, Vermont
Joseph Hayes, 23 Manor Road, West Brighton, Staten Island, New York
Henry Jacobi, 2141 La Porte Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
Samuel Jim Jaja, St. Michael's School, Aba, Nigeria, West Africa
Charles Johnson, 1808 Berkly Avenue, Grand Rapids, Kent County, Michigan
L. R. Jonas, "Ashmore," 31 Marlborough Avenue, Woodville Estate, South Australia
Ray Keene, Route 2, Box 89, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Walter Knutson, Company H, 2nd Infantry, Camp Custer, Battle Creek, Michigan
Dean E. Larsen, Box 205, Wales, Utah
John McCarthy, 313—22nd Street, Brooklyn, New York
Willis McDowell, 1504 Aillom Street, Chicago, Illinois
W. J. McNamara, Jr., Safe Products Company, 111 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York
Wallace MacDonald, P. O. Box 210, Stellarton, Nova Scotia, Canada
Raul Martinez, Lealtad 68, Havana, Cuba
Jose Menendez, Jr., Calle 17, No. 7 (altos), Vedado, Havana, Cuba
Soly Meyer, Praca Artur de Azevedo, 25, Cascadura, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, South America
Walter Murray, 955 North Lockwood, Chicago, Illinois

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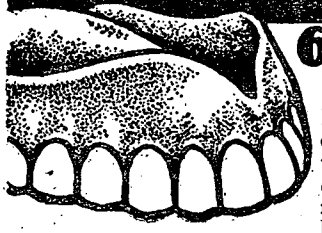
FALSE TEETH



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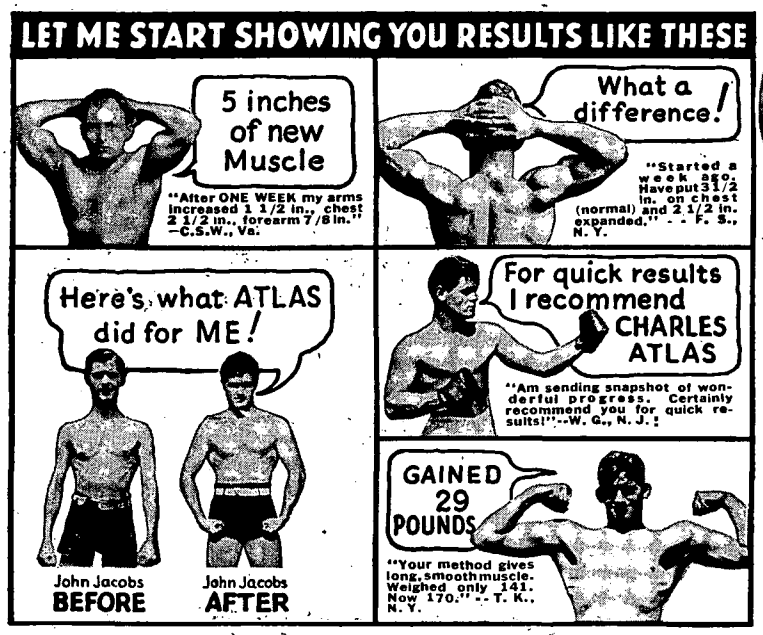
Will You Give Me 7 Days to PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man?*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CHARLES ATLAS

A recent photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

This is not a studio picture but a simple enlargement made from an ordinary small snapshot. No muscles "painted on" or retouched in any way. This is Charles Atlas as he looks today!

7-Day TRIAL OFFER

I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But what **you** want to know is—"What can Charles Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—**at my risk!** Right in first 7 days I'll start to PROVE I can turn YOU into a man of might and muscle. And it will be the kind of PROOF you (and anyone else) can SEE, FEEL, MEASURE with a tape!

My FREE BOOK tells about my amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER—an offer no other physical instructor has ever DARED make! If YOU want smashing strength, big muscles, glowing health, I'll show you results QUICK!

STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it, engraved, to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

FREE BOOK I myself was once a 97-pound weakling—sickly, half-alive. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." And I twice won—against all comers—the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"!

I have no use for apparatus. "Dynamic Tension" ALONE **(right in your own home)** will start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountains of muscle on your biceps—free you of constipation, pimples—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

Make me PROVE it! Gamble a postage stamp. Send coupon for my **FREE BOOK AT ONCE!** Address me personally: **Charles Atlas, Dept. 9Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

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I want proof that DYNAMIC TENSION will make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."**

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SPRINGBOARD ACE. Jane Fauntz Manske says: "When I smoke Camels at mealtimes and after, I find that my digestion runs more smoothly." The best meal digests easier when you smoke Camels.

THREE-TIME OLYMPIC WINNER in the high dive. Dorothy Poynton Hill says: "I prefer Camels because they don't get on my nerves. And, like so many other women, I like Camel's flavor."

WHAT SOME OF AMERICA'S AQUATIC STARS SAY ABOUT SMOKING...

(*Left*) **LENORE KIGHT WINGARD.** She has broken 7 World's Records—16 Nat'l Records—in speed swimming. Lenore comments on smoking: "Camels are certainly mild. They never jangle my nerves."

MISS GLORIA WHEEDEN says: "I always think of smoking Camels and eating as going together."

(*Right*) **HAROLD "DUTCH" SMITH,** who holds Olympic diving championships, says: "I've found great pleasure in Camels. I long ago found Camels restore my energy after a strenuous meet."

(*Left*) **PETE DESJARDINS** — internationally famous diver—speaking: "Divers like a *mild* cigarette that doesn't upset nerves. That's why I prefer Camels."

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Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS — Turkish and Domestic — than any other popular brand

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FOR DIGESTION'S SAKE — SMOKE CAMELS

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